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ROBERT WREFORD'S

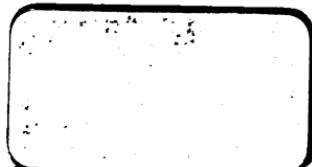
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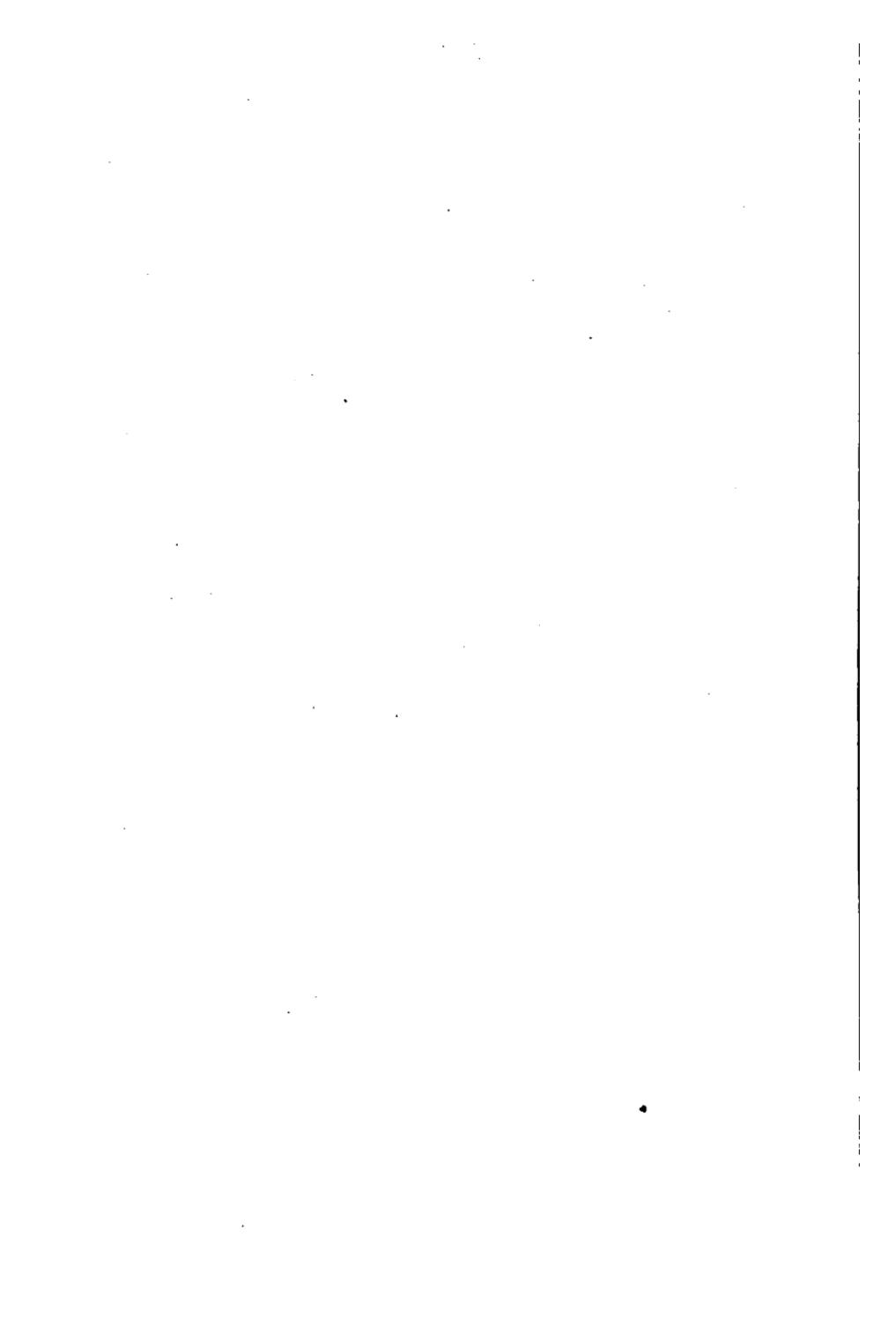
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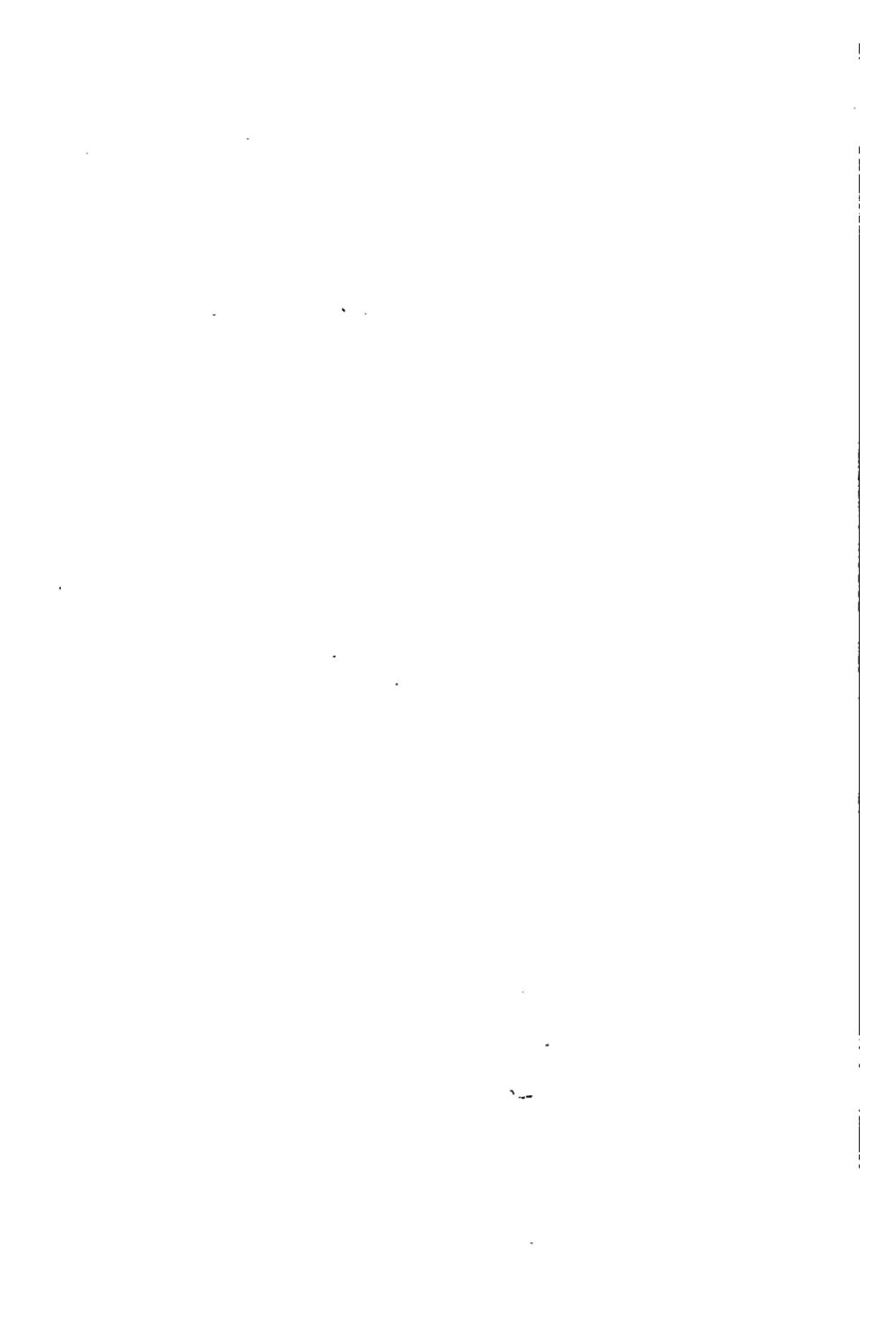








ROBERT WREFORD'S DAUGHTER.



ROBERT WREFORD'S DAUGHTER.

BY

EMMA JANE WORBOISE,

*Author of "The Grey House at Endlestone," "Thornycroft Hall," "Overdue,"
"Lady Clarissa," "The Fortunes of Cyril Denham," &c., &c.*

" That all the jarring notes of life
 Seem blending in a psalm,
And all the angles of its strife
 Slow rounding into calm.

" And so the shadows fall apart,
 And so the west-winds play,
And all the windows of my heart
 I open to the day."

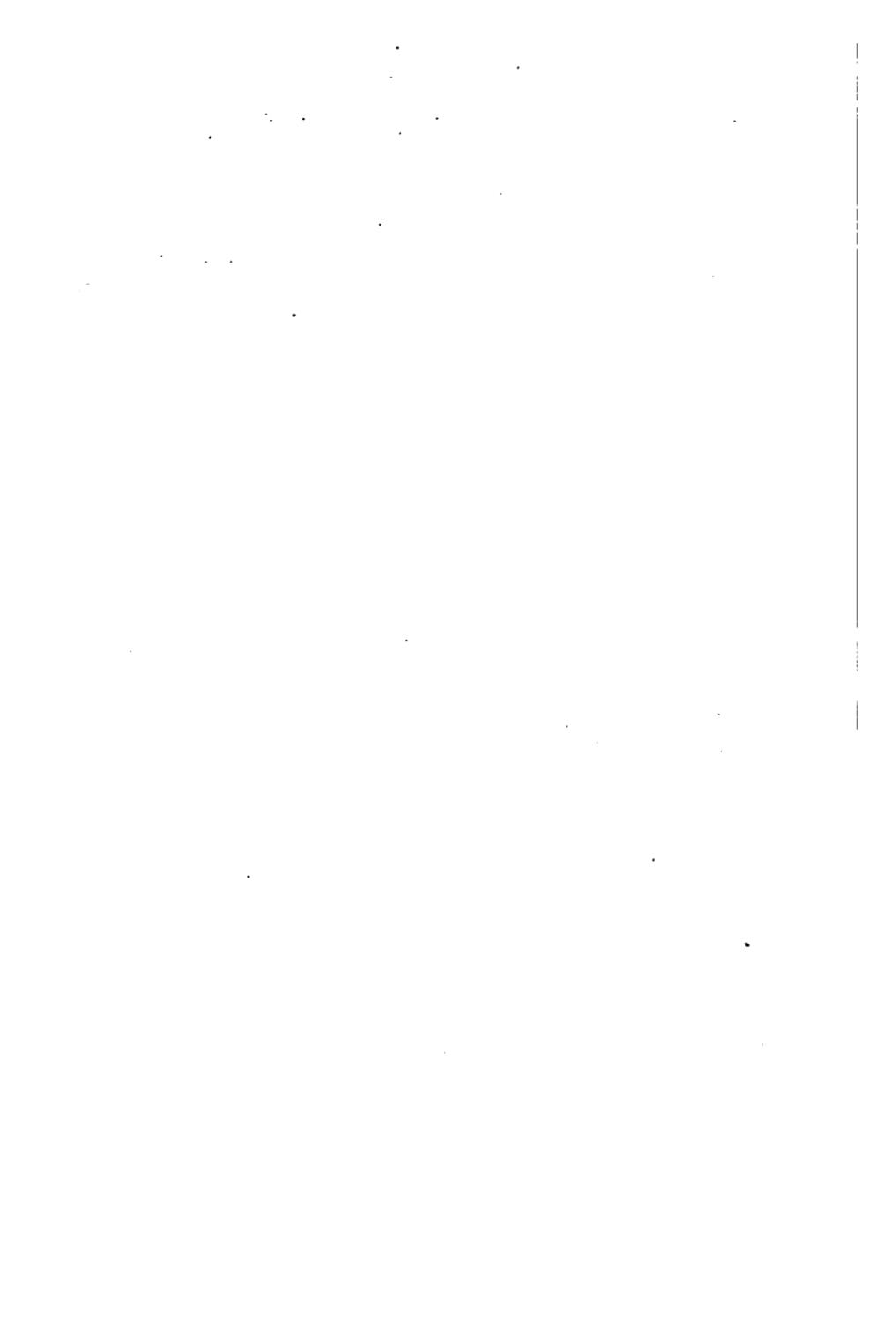


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ROBERT WREFORD'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

A YOUNG MAN *NOT* OF THE PERIOD.

IN a neat and scrupulously clean, but poorly-furnished sitting-room, in a small house in an obscure street in the north of London, sat two persons, on a certain wet, cold evening, in the early winter of a year, the precise date of which I am not obliged to mention.

Outside it was miserable enough, as such evenings generally are in London, and, as far as that goes, everywhere else all over the world, for there had been a slow, drizzling rain all day, which about nightfall settled into a quiet, steady downpour; the cold, for the season, was severe, and the streets were almost ankle-deep in mud and slush. Inside it was extremely comfortable; the shutters were closed, the red curtains closely drawn, the lamp lighted, the fire blazing cheerfully, the cat purring on the hearth, and supper on the table.

The two persons to whom I am about to draw your attention were man and wife; and there was also, on one side of the fire-place, snugly covered up in an old-fashioned wicker cradle on large wooden rockers, a baby sound asleep.

Robert and Catherine Wreford, the parents of this infant, were not a very young couple. They had been

betrothed as almost boy and girl; but being prudent people, they had elected to wait till circumstances warranted their union rather than "marry in haste to repent at leisure."

I said they were prudent people, but I am not sure that there was much prudence on Catherine's side; woman-like, she would have made any sacrifice and run any risk for the sake of the man she truly loved, had Robert been willing to wed on uncertain prospects, and a present income of a little less than a pound a week. But Robert was largely endowed with worldly wisdom; he was, if anything, *too* prudent, *too* calculating; he took life coolly and dispassionately, he weighed well his words and actions, and though slow in arriving at a decision, he was never known to swerve from any settled purpose. For the rest, he was steady—a man of his calibre could scarcely have been otherwise; he was faithful and trustworthy, and sincerely religious—according to his lights. He had moderate abilities, but he made the best of them, as he did of everything else, indeed, that fell to his earthly portion; and people called him an excellent young man, though, perhaps, now and then a trifle over-cautious.

Though born on this side of the Tweed he had Scotch blood in his veins, and that, perhaps, accounted for his utter want of impulsiveness and his excessive prudence. He was left an orphan in his boyhood, and the few relations he had were not inclined to do more for him than bare necessity demanded. His education, as far as schools and schoolmasters were concerned, terminated abruptly when his father died—his mother he scarcely remembered. He "went to work" when most boys in the lower middle-class are still at lessons and at play, and, to do him justice, he bravely accepted his fate, and worked perseveringly and well. He was apprenticed to a handicraft trade—not by any means a lucrative one; his master was poor and plodding, and in a quiet way of business, in a respectable but very drowsy country town, a hundred miles and more distant from the great metropolis.

It was one of Robert's specialities of character that he always had a goal before him; he never worked without a settled aim, and before he was sixteen he had the pro-

gramme of his future career drawn up, not indeed upon paper, but upon his own heart and brain, and to it he steadily adhered, seldom, if ever, faltering, though a thousand difficulties bristled all along his chosen path. Robert had a friend—Fred Calvert—and to him he imparted his intention, so far as his immediate future was concerned.

“Fred,” said he, as they walked home from church one warm summer evening, “don’t you think Market-Worbridge is a very dull town?” to which Fred replied, that in his estimation it was the dullest place that could be found between John o’ Groat’s and the Land’s End!

“I could not say so much,” was Robert’s sober rejoinder, “because I have never travelled from Cornwall to Caithness, and Worbridge is the only town I know anything about, so far as personal knowledge goes, that is; but I have heard, and I have read, and I have made up my mind that I’ll go elsewhere, the moment I am my own master.”

“Where will you go?”

“To London! I like the best of everything. What is second-rate is scarcely worth striving for. Yes! I know what you would say, and what older and wiser folks than you would say to me. I know London is the great vortex of wealth and poverty, of good fortune and of ill fortune. I know one must either sink or swim in its turbulent deep waters; but *I don’t mean to sink!* I’ll keep afloat anyhow—God willing; and when that tide comes in my affairs that comes to every brave swimmer in his turn, I’ll take it and turn it to the best account.”

“You have no friends in London?”

“Not one that I know of. What odds! I must be my own friend, that’s all. And I have two hands that don’t mind work, two eyes that can see pretty plainly all about them, a tolerably clear head, a healthy body, and a determination to succeed. That will carry me a good way,—or *ought to*.”

“Ah!” said Fred, with the air of a philosopher, “there are a great many things, Robin, that ought to be, and that—*ain’t!*”

“That’s because people put ‘I’d rather’ before ‘I

ought ;' because they prefer 'may' to 'must ;' because they go in debt for fish, flesh, and fowl, when they can barely pay for daily bread and cheese, and an onion by way of relish on Sundays."

Now Fred Calvert, who was far better off than Robert Wreford, inasmuch as he had parents who were well-to-do, and who grudged him nothing that it was in their power to give, was already a little bit of a sybarite. He liked his bread buttered on both sides, and ready buttered at command ; he did not approve of any kind of hard fare, and though, to a certain extent, he believed in honest labour, he believed still more in what he called a moderate amount of pleasure. "Slow and steady wins the race," was Wreford's favourite motto ; "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," was Calvert's ; and he took exceeding care not to become "dull" through any excess of toil. He was not exactly lazy, he had good principles, as far as they went ; and his intentions were always of the very best. But, though his *vertebrae* were all right, he sadly wanted moral backbone—the sort of backbone without which no man, however talented, however lucky, however well-intentioned, ever yet won the crown of a truly honourable and successful career.

He tried to dissuade Robert from what seemed to him a wild-goose scheme ; but he might as well have tried to turn the tide to ebb when it was flowing in from the great sea. "There's plenty of time for getting ready," said Robert, at last ; "but I mean to go, and I thought I would tell you. Of course you won't say anything about it at present."

"Of course not." And so the matter ended ; and the subject was not resumed for several years—not till Robert was nineteen and his term of apprenticeship had ended.

And even then very little was said : the young man had too much to do to be wasting precious hours, or minutes, on unprofitable conversation, and he felt, besides, that Calvert and he were scarcely in sympathy on this and on many other points. But if he said nothing, he thought the more, and thinking with Robert always evolved itself into action—very cautious action truly, and for the most part silent and unobtrusive, yet *action* still,

that would certainly bear fruit of some kind for to-morrow, if not exactly for to-day. He had contrived to save some money by diligently hoarding all that he could possibly spare of his own small stock, and by working over-hours, not always at his own trade, but at anything else that he could do, and for any honest person who would employ him; thus earning divers small sums, which he religiously added to what he called his "capital."

It was not much when, on his nineteenth birthday, he counted it over for the hundredth time; but still it was enough to keep him from starving while he was looking about for work, and he naturally objected to starvation; because, as he said afterwards, "It's painful, it's damping to one's energies, and it's not respectable." And Robert thought a great deal about being respectable; he did not care a jot about being genteel, and he had the profoundest contempt for the vulgarity of pretence of any sort; but respectability was his *fetish*, and without it he felt that he never could be content, to say nothing of being really happy. So he looked complacently on his little heap of ready money, and determined to eke it out by dint of the most rigid economy, and then he laid his plans for the long anticipated journey.

A hundred miles, or more, lay between him and London. Should he walk there, or avail himself of the cheapest mode of conveyance? It was some time before he could make up his mind as to which course he would pursue. "Of course," he said to himself, "walking, at first sight, seems the most economical, because you are never charged for the hire of Shanks's pony; but, then, there's the wear and tear of the animal, and he can't travel from day to day without being fed, and he can't, like other ponies, lie down at night under a hedge and take his rest! I wonder in how many days I could walk to London? If there was any earthly thing I could do upon the road, just to earn a few shillings for the frugalest bed and board, I'd make a regular tour through all the towns and villages that lie between this and the metropolis; for I should like to see a little of the world, though, for the matter of that, London *is* the world, as I've heard tell. But what *could* I do that would help me on my way? I couldn't work

and travel too, and if I am to be stationary, I may as well stop and work at Market-Worbridge. No, it won't do. I should be days and days on the road, and I should spend most of my money, and wear out my shoes and my clothes, besides looking like a regular tramp when I got to the end of my journey. And, then, there is my trunk! Well, I could leave that behind, and have it sent on when I got settled somewhere; I could make a big parcel of my other suit, and of the few things I could not do without. But that, again, would not be quite the thing. It don't look respectable to go to a new place without any luggage. People might be chary of taking one in, and small blame to them for it. I think I'll split the difference. I'll get carrier Sampson to take my trunk to Dunborough, and I'll put some bread and cheese in my pocket and walk there myself; it's five-and-twenty miles, and I could do it in the day, if I set out early in the morning; then I'll take the night train to London—the one that carries you at the rate of a penny a mile—that will be six and sixpence, or thereabouts, my trunk included; so that it won't cost me, altogether, more than half-a-sovereign, for I know Sampson will be content with a trifle from me. I've done him more than one good turn."

A little more reflection, a little more consideration of sundry small difficulties, and the matter was finally decided. He stayed one day at Calvert's house; he might have stayed a week or longer, but he reasoned that it would never do to accustom himself to ease and comfort—nay, to luxury! for the Calverts lived in what seemed to Robert a most luxurious and sumptuous style. They had hot meat every day for dinner and a pudding; there was always a good jug of home-made, foaming ale upon the table. There was coffee, with eggs and bacon, in the morning, and tea and bread and butter, *ad libitum*, in the evening; not to mention supper, for which Mrs. Calvert generally provided some modest dainty, in the shape of shell-fish, or fruit-pie, or perhaps a tender roast chicken of her own rearing. The Calverts' house was to Robert as Capua was to the Carthaginian soldiers, and he knew it, and resolved not to run the risk of dangerous enervation. One day he

gave to friendship—the only friendship of his youth; for one day he fed at a board that appeared to him prodigal in its lavish hospitality; for one night he slept in the grand, curtained four-poster—or, rather, he tossed about in it wakefully enough, and longed for dawn; and then he bade farewell to Market-Worbridge and its inhabitants, and it was many a year before he saw its dull quiet streets and dirty lanes again.

He carried with him something that was of more value even than his hard-earned, hardly-saved stock of coin—two recommendations for honesty, sobriety, and general integrity. One was a formal testimonial, which his master readily furnished; the other was from a good Quaker, for whom Robert had worked at odd times, deeming no sort of job beneath him. It ran thus:—

“ *Oak Tree House, Worbridge, Marlshire,*
“ *7th day, 6th month, 18—.*

“ I hereby certify that I have known Robert Wreford from his childhood. That he comes of a decent stock; that he is honest, truthful, steady, industrious, and willing to put his hand to anything. His capacity is good; but he is ambitious and obstinate. He is a skilled workman in his trade, but does not choose to stick to it, for reasons which I cannot disapprove. He has worked for me in various ways during the last five years, and always to my satisfaction. I hold him to be a virtuous, God-fearing youth, though not of the Society of Friends. Any further inquiries may be made of me.

“ *ISAIAH RICKMAN.*”

“ Thou mayst as well carry it straight to some friends of mine in the City,” said the old gentleman, as he gave the document into Robert’s hand. “ If they do not want thee, and I scarcely think they will, they may know of some one else whom thou mayst serve. It is to the respectable firm of Hankins and Bright that I direct thee. See, that is their full address. They will know my writing as well as they know their own. Now, farewell, and God speed thee. Be a good lad, don’t go into bad company, nor enter any evil place of resort, and go to

thy steeple-house, if thou wilt stick to steeple-houses, on first-day morning."

Robert's journey was without adventure. He walked, as he had proposed, to Dunborough; then he took the cheap slow train to London, which he reached in safety, and as he neared the precincts of the mighty city, which is a nation in itself, he—like the hero of "Locksley Hall"—heard "his days before him, and the tumult of his life." He was too tired, and, to say the truth, too much amazed at all he saw, to go that day and present Mr. Rickman's recommendation. Also, it was well upon noon before he got to town, for the "slow train" was unusually slow, and would have sorely tried the patience of any one accustomed to railway travel; and by the time he had dined and found a lodging for the night, it wanted not so long till four o'clock—too late, as he presumed, to seek an interview with either Mr. Bright or Mr. Hankins.

But next day he set forth as early as he dared, and after some little difficulty found Fenchurch Street, in which were the warehouses and offices of the noted Quaker firm. He saw both partners, and stood the fire of their keen interrogations so well, that they mutually pronounced him "a lad of sense, modest, and yet shrewd," and well fitted to their service; for, as it happened, they did, just then, want a young man to undertake certain duties in their establishment, and, what was more, they wanted him immediately, for they were short of hands, and under pressure, by reason of a Government contract that it concerned their reputation to fulfil punctually to the very hour.

Robert could hardly believe that he was wide awake when he found himself engaged to come next day; he had not hoped to be so fortunate in securing instant occupation. He was quite prepared for wearisome delay, and for many a heart-sickening disappointment; he had even prepared himself to be driven to extremities. And to extremities he might well have come, but for good Isaiah Rickman, who hoped at one stroke to serve both the steady lad, whose pluck and soberness of character he admired, and his own friends, who were excellent masters, provided they were excellently served. Mr. Hankins, however, informed Robert that he must only consider

himself on probation, and that further inquiries would be instituted respecting him by addressing his old master, Friend Rickman, and the minister of the church he had been accustomed to attend. In the meantime, he would be compensated for his services according to their value.

Thus relieved of all immediate anxiety, Robert entered on his situation with spirit, and with an almost dogged determination to make himself of importance to his employers. He was fresh to the business, certainly, but he knew a little about most things, and he was gifted with ready tact, keen perceptions, and, best of all, with a wondrous power of adaptation. He worked with a will, and yet with discretion; he kept his eyes and his ears wide open, and he was never too proud to ask for information when it was actually required. He was ready to learn from anybody who could and would teach him, and no trivialities that concerned his daily duties were beneath his notice. And so the first book of the history of his life came to its conclusion, and the second was fairly and happily commenced.

Several years passed on, and Robert was trusted and promoted more than once; he made but few acquaintances, and those few were of his own sober stamp; he worked with untiring assiduity, striving to master all the complications of the extensive business of the firm, and letting no opportunity escape him. He lived hard, content with plainest fare and humblest lodgings; he dressed well for his position, believing that good clothes were best, besides adding something at least to the outward *status* of the man; but he never indulged in the slightest luxury of the toilet—he would as soon have dreamed of going to the West End, and dining *en carte du jour*, as of purchasing an extra necktie or an unnecessary waistcoat. Once, when he had been in London some months, a brother clerk showed him a costly-looking set of shirt-studs, which he had lately bought. “They are very handsome,” said Robert, admiringly—for he had aesthetic tastes, though he did not indulge them—“but they must have cost you a pretty penny, Henderson?”

Henderson laughed and coloured slightly. “Come, now,” said he, “I’ll tell you, because I know you won’t

be up to chaff, like the other fellows. They didn't cost a pound ! for they are only the very best *imitation*. I am sure—except with the trade, you know—they would pass for the genuine thing."

"I think they would," replied Robert. "To what a pitch of perfection they have brought this sort of thing ! I don't think it's a good sign of the age, though ; and yet one can't help but admire such very clever workmanship. Yes, they are beautiful-looking."

"There's another set just like this one," said Henderson. "Why don't you treat yourself ?"

It was Robert's turn to smile now ; he shook his head, as he replied, "No, I'm too ambitious !"

"You don't mean to say you go in for actual jewellery, eighteen carat gold and real stones ?"

"I should just as soon go in for white elephants or Arabian steeds ! It will be many a year before I buy studs, but when I do they will not be imitations. I can't afford to buy anything that is not the best."

So Robert kept the even tenor of his way, working hard in the warehouse and counting-house—for he seemed to have something to do with every department—studying whenever he could find leisure and books, and taking long walks for the sake of his constitution, for he was far too wise to neglect his body while he cultivated his intellect. He was, of course, a water-drinker—a total abstainer ; but not so much from principle as from motives of rigid economy. "I don't want it," he would say to any one who argued with him on the subject. "I don't need it, and it costs money. If the time should come when I do want it, and when I can well afford it, I'll drink beer and wine ; till then, I'll keep to cold water. Youth and health can dispense with alcohol. Besides, it's abominably dear."

But one thing Robert did which no one would have expected of him. He had barely passed his twentieth birthday when he fell in love ! In those days there was a religious Nonconforming service held regularly in the building so well known as Salter's Hall. With the congregation there assembling week after week, Robert almost accidentally, as it seemed, identified himself, and there he met with Catherine Halliday, a girl rather

younger than himself, and, as he thought, indescribably charming. Catherine was motherless, but she had a father, as she supposed, somewhere—she neither knew where, nor did she wish to know; she had been brought up to get her own living as a dressmaker, and now she was in a City house of business, in the character of what is technically called an “improver.” Like Edwin and Emma in Tickell’s ballad—

“A mutual flame was quickly caught,
And quickly, too, revealed;”

and before Robert had begun to think whether it would be expedient to have a sweetheart, he had one, and was under an engagement of marriage. Catherine was a good girl, very nice looking, extremely amiable, very clever with her needle, and altogether of thrifty, industrious habits. She suited Robert so well, that he might not have made a better choice had all the London maidens of his own degree been at his disposal.

But, as you know, Robert was *prudent*, and so it was understood from the first that they were not to think of marriage till circumstances should justify their union. Robert’s wages, at the period of his betrothal, were eighteen shillings a week; and by dint of severest economy, and much self-denial, he had not only kept intact the sum of money that remained to him when he reached London, but added to it, by sixpences and threepences, another pound. To marry on eighteen shillings a week was, of course, suicidal. Catherine had her own business, certainly; but Robert had seen quite enough of life to know that it is most unwise to depend upon a woman’s earnings. It would be all very well if his wife could bring in a little now and then to help the general fund, but it would never do to count upon it; he quite believed in the old saying about love flying out of the window when poverty comes in at the door; and he knew that if he hampered himself prematurely with family ties—hampered, harassed, and bound, hand and foot, he might be to the end of his existence, and he could never be the wealthy, prosperous man he had determined on being almost ever since he could remember.

Besides, he was only twenty, and Catherine a full year younger; it would be quite time enough to think about marriage when he was five-and-twenty; and meanwhile it would be very pleasant to have Catherine for a companion, and to look forward to a period when they could prudently set up housekeeping. And Catherine entirely acquiesced; all that Robert proposed must be right, and she esteemed herself a most fortunate girl, in that she had secured so satisfactory a lover. She would have married him on eighteen shillings a week had he desired it, and worked her fingers to the bone; as it was, she was quite content to wait, and get a little dressmaking connection of her own, and put by a little money till Robert's income should warrant them in fixing the wedding-day.

But years went on, and though Robert's income steadily increased, and his position in the house became more and more assured, he could not feel that he had as yet enough to live on, respectably, as a married man. So they "kept company" year after year, the soberest, most matter-of-fact pair of lovers that ever waited for their wedding. Catherine was successful in her business, and contrived to lay by a nice little sum towards furnishing and the marriage outfit; but her youthful bloom was passing, and her companions, who saw her Sunday after Sunday with "her young man" at Salter's Hall, or taking an afternoon walk with him arm-in-arm, laughed at her for her faith and patience, and prophesied that he would give her the slip at last, and leave her to perpetual spinsterhood.

He did not, however; for there came a day when he told her that he thought they might now venture to unite themselves in holy matrimony without any great imprudence. He was making a hundred and fifty pounds a year, and he had some money laid by for furnishing, and for wedding expenses. What did she say to that day month?

Catherine of course said "Yes." And when the day came, they were married very quietly in one of the City churches. They took two days' holiday, which they spent on the borders of Epping Forest, and then they came home to the small house which they had taken and furnished in the northern district of the metropolis.

CHAPTER II.

"WHAT'S IN A NAME?"

ROBERT was thirty years old when he went to church with Catherine Halliday, and the pair had been engaged ten years. They settled down at once in their comfortable little home ; letting, however, two of their best rooms, as London housekeepers of limited means are much in the practice of doing. Mrs. Wreford went on with her dress-making for several years, and then arrived the baby, whom we have already noticed as sleeping in the old-fashioned cradle, and the dressmaking was at once and for ever given up.

As they sat by the fireside, they were talking of a somewhat important event which was to take place upon the morrow. The baby was going to be christened, and it was not yet decided what her name should be.

"We must make up our minds to-night," said Catherine, as she finished her last morsel of bread and cheese, and replenished her glass with pure water, for Robert had long ago bought a *filter*, holding it as his opinion that water-drinkers who consumed common, unpurified London water were little better than suicides ; and certainly helped largely to swell the incomes of the medical men of the metropolis, to the injury of their own pockets. "Let it be a pretty name."

"One name is as pretty as another, I think," replied Robert, who was not in one of his happiest moods that evening ; he was weary, and he had got wet, and he was what his wife called "a little out of sorts," which meant that he was just a little out of temper.

"I should like her to have a nice name, because, you see, it is for life," continued Catherine meditatively. "We quite decided that she should not have my name ?"

"Of course we did ; there is always a certain inconvenience and confusion when mother and daughter have the

same name. Two Catherines in the house would be just one too much."

"But we might call her Kitty, or Katie. I used to be called 'Katie' when I was a little girl. I like it a great deal better than formal Catherine."

"How foolish! If a girl is to be called Katie she should be christened Katie. To be Catherine and Katie too is ridiculous, next thing to an *alias*. Besides, I abominate what are styled pet-names; some of them are supremely silly."

"What do you say to Emily? It was my little sister's name."

"Too romantic by half! Let the child have a plain, sensible, matter-of-fact, work-a-day name. Nothing could be better than Mary or Ann."

"We might join the two, then, and say Marianne. Or, better still, Marian! Marian is such a short, sweet name, I always think. And I fancy Marians are always good."

"My dear Catherine, I wish you would not talk nonsense. What can a name have to do with a person's character? Shall we say Ann? There are so many Marys."

"There are quite as many Annas as Marys," replied Catherine, almost tearfully. She was not quite strong just then, and she did so wish her baby—her little treasure of a daughter—to have what she called "a beautiful, suggestive name." There was little chance of it, however, if Robert had otherwise determined; for Catherine had yielded to him in every particular so long, that he had come to expect an instantaneous acceptance of his own plans and notions, whatever they might be. Catherine had always had a strong element of romance in her character; and Robert, though he had an aesthetic side to his nature, altogether distrusted and deprecated the smallest approach to it. After the first few weeks, his courtship had been of the most prosaic order; it was not, therefore, any wonder that he should be a still more prosaic husband. Catherine's very mild opposition in this instance irritated him exceedingly; all the more that he was conscious of it, and despised himself for not keeping his temper under better control.

There was a short silence, and then Mrs. Wreford returned to the charge with renewed courage. "If it were a boy, now," she said, "I should leave the naming of it to you entirely; but I think, dear, as it is a little girl, I ought, at least, to have a voice in the selection."

"And you have a voice," he answered, somewhat gruffly. "I propose *Ann*, and you at once put your *veto* on it. If that is not having a voice, I don't know what is; only you women are so unreasonable, so utterly illogical, so fond of having the last word."

Which might be true enough of the sex generally; but it was a most unjust accusation to bring against poor Catherine, who generally said, "Yes, dear," and "No, dear," to all her husband's arbitrary propositions, with the meekness of a dove and the patience of a Griselda. "Well," he continued, "if *Ann* won't suit, what will?"

"What do you say to *Madeline*?" she asked, unwilling to give up the contest on which so much depended.

"Altogether out of the question! It's the same name as *Magdalen*, and that always makes one think of a nun, or, worse still, of the inmate of a penitentiary! No daughter of mine shall be called *Madeline*, though Keats did write a poem about a *Madeline*, who, by the way, behaved herself in a very questionable manner."

"Isabel, then?"

"Say *Jezebel* at once! It's all the same."

"Very well, I will say no more," replied Catherine, with just a slight accent of temper in her voice. "I perceive that you have made up your mind, so it is of no use my talking any more about it. Why did you consult me, if you had settled it beforehand?"

"*Ann* is a good, sensible, English-sounding name; besides, it was my mother's name."

"Why did you not say so before, dear? I should not have said a word had I known that was why you preferred that name to any other."

"I am not sure that it was why. However, we won't discuss it any more. I am tired, and want to go to bed. Let it be *Ann*, then."

"Might it not be *Anne*? I like it so much better with the final *e*."

"It sounds just the same."

"But it looks differently—very differently. Please, Robert, do let me have my own way so far!"

"Very well," he said, yawning, and feeling that he really might concede a single letter. "It shall be *Anne*, then, if you are so set upon it; but mind, I won't have the child called 'Annie,' or anything so foolish."

Catherine said no more, though she had privately resolved before her husband spoke to turn *Anne* into *Annie*, for common use. Then the baby woke, and had to be taken up. Next day she was finally christened, and entered on the register, as plain *Anne Wreford*.

CHAPTER III.

THE WREFORDS' WEDDING-DAY.

LITTLE *Anne* grew and prospered. She was a remarkably healthy, happy child, seldom crying or fretting, cutting her teeth with singular facility, and peculiarly exempt from those ills and maladies to which infant existence is so prone. She was what people call "such a good baby!" and it was the continual boast of her parents that from the hour of her birth she had never cost them one wakeful night. A fact for which Catherine was only thankful, since Robert would never have borne the inconvenience of broken rest with anything like the usual amount of paternal equanimity. Once, indeed, when baby was about three months old, and showed symptoms of fretfulness at a late hour, he said, crossly, "I tell you what it is, Catherine, you and that young squaller will have to migrate to the attic, if she is going to make that noise! You had better have the bed made up to-morrow in readiness, for, of course, it won't do for *me* to be disturbed. I must keep a clear head, or I shall not be fit for business, and

nothing more upsets a man—causing him to be lazy and inefficient—than the loss of his natural repose."

Which was all very true; although Catherine thought Robert might have spoken a little less impatiently, or, at least, have waited till he really was disturbed before he delivered himself of his exordium. For, as it happened, he cried out before he was hurt; baby sobbed herself to sleep even while he was yet speaking, and no more was heard of her till it was time to get her up and dress her next morning. Nevertheless, Catherine prepared the upper room, with a view to turning it into a night-nursery, should such an arrangement become expedient.

And so months rolled on, and the little girl began to babble and chatter prettily; she crawled about the floor, she seemed trying to teach herself to walk, and before she was a year and a quarter old, she could run alone without many stumblings and downfalls. She was a brave child, too, taking things naturally by the smooth handle, and making the best of all her little troubles. If she fell down, instead of roaring after the manner of her kind, she picked herself up again and laughed; even if she were hurt—and as a matter of course she had her share of bumps and tumbles—she seldom did more than whimper for a few seconds. Even Robert confessed that she was "a downright good little maid;" while her mother believed her to be the best and sweetest child that ever lived. The fact being that Miss Anne Wreford was endowed with a very even and placid temper, and with nerves that could afford to despise and ignore all ordinary shocks and *contretemps*.

As for Catherine, her life would have been dull and grey indeed without her darling, for as time slipped away Robert grew more reserved, more taciturn, more generally undemonstrative. He was never actually unkind, though often inconsiderate; he would have scorned the idea of neglecting his wife, or of venting his temper upon her; he treated her with a certain respect; ever since the day he determined to ask her to marry him, his thoughts had never wandered, even cursorily, to any other woman; he "took care of the main chance," as he constantly phrased it, and did his best to provide for his family, denying him-

self any kind of luxury or pleasure, and insisting always on the strictest economy as regarded household expenditure. In short, he deemed himself a model husband, and would have been astonished beyond measure had it ever occurred to Catherine to make any sort of complaint, or to expostulate with him on his marvellous coolness of demeanour.

Once and once only Catherine ventured to say a word on the subject of her grievances, for grievances she had, though she had the rare wisdom to keep them to herself. Little Anne was in her seventh year, and it was the tenth anniversary of her parents' wedding-day—or, rather, it was the evening before the anniversary—and Catherine had a little scheme in her head for next day, which she determined to try and carry out if possible. Robert came home in good time, also in a good temper, which was not invariably the case, and when he had changed his coat and sat down to his early supper, he seemed not indisposed for conversation. It was rather a nice little supper too, though it was only a *réchauffé* of the cold mutton which had been roasted for the Sunday's dinner; but Catherine had a fine gift of improvising all sorts of nice little dishes out of odds and ends. She thought a great deal of her husband's creature-comforts; and while bread and cheese or a plain boiled egg served her turn, often as not, she nearly always contrived to have some inexpensive small dainty ready for his evening meal. She knew how to make *risoles*, which Robert found extremely toothsome; she was continually serving up potatoes in some new and unwonted form; she was grand at salads; and as for puddings, her list of them was inexhaustible. In short, without equalling the famous *cordon-bleu*, who boasted of having served up fifteen *entrées* from a couple of horse-shoes, or the cook who improvised three courses out of a tallow candle, Catherine had a wonderful faculty for turning scraps to account; she kept a good table on far less than many spend on a bad table, and her one little maid declared that “mistress made beautiful soup out of little less than nothing, and rich gravies out of shreds and bits that she thought were only fit for the cat, or to be thrown away!”

So this evening Catherine had a nice little *plat*, as the French would say, for her husband's supper, all hot and savoury, the moment he was ready for it;—a nice fresh crisp salad, artistically dressed and mingled, and a charming little pudding, which she called “Catherine's pudding,” because the receipt of it was her own invention. And Robert seemed quite to appreciate the good things provided for him; though, man-like, he took them entirely as a matter of course, and never dreamed of giving his wife the credit of that exquisite culinary skill and perfect thrift which she combined in her house-keeping, and which is so rare an accomplishment with women of any class.

She waited till he had satisfied his appetite on a couple of tasty *rissoles*, and mashed potatoes lightly browned, and turned out of a shape, and till he had drunk his first cup of coffee, and then she began: “Robert, dear! do you know what to-morrow is?”

“To-morrow? No! Is it any sort of red-letter day?” and he took out his pocket-book and began to search in the calendar for the month.

“Oh, you will not find it there,” she resumed, colouring slightly; “but don't you remember to-morrow ten years?”

“No, I don't; stay, though! we were married in June, and about this time, I fancy, though I have quite forgotten the precise day. Is to-morrow our wedding-day?”

“Yes, to be sure! Oh, you good-for-nothing husband, to forget all about it!”

“My dear Catherine, I have something of more importance to think about. Besides, what good does it do, recalling the fact? It made some difference on the day itself, I grant, but what does the recurrence of the day do for either of us?”

“It is to me, at least, a very happy memory!”

“I am very glad to hear it,” said Robert, looking as if, on the whole, he were rather pleased to hear it. Then he added, “And I do not know that I have ever regretted it, though I have often thought it would have been more prudent had we waited a few years longer. I should have saved more money.”

"Money is not the only thing in life!" said the wife, quite sharply for her.

"Not the only thing, certainly; but it is the great thing in life, when all is said and done. Money gives independence, and, coupled with good conduct, respectability, and status, it gives power, it gives scope to one's energies and ambitions; when the right time comes, it gives divers luxuries and refinements, which I can fully appreciate, though at present I am content to forego them. In short, my dear, there is no saying what it does *not* give, if honestly acquired and prudently expended! Pray don't underrate the merit of good cash, and plenty of it."

"I do not," replied Catherine. "I often think how pleasant it must be to have plenty of money; to have enough for all one's needs, and for some few luxuries, without pinching and contriving, and incessantly inquiring, 'Can we afford it?' I should like all that and a little more besides."

"So should I, my dear; but the time is not yet come. It will come, however; it *shall* come! That is to say," he added hastily, "if God spare my life, and still give me health and strength of mind and body. Have patience, Catherine; I mean to be a rich man."

"Do you?" said Catherine, rather sadly. "I don't see how it can come about; it is not very likely that the firm will raise your salary much more. I cannot say they are very generous, though, considering your services—long and faithful services! Why, if the business was every bit your own, you could not devote yourself to it more entirely. And you have been in the employ of Bright and Hankins full twenty years."

"Almost one-and-twenty years," responded Robert, with a curious smile; the truth being that he was in receipt of a much more liberal stipend than Catherine had any idea of; that, as the heads of the firm grew older, so much was left in his hands that he had become gradually the chief authority in the house, and was in a position, if he chose, to start on his own account, should it seem expedient. How astonished Catherine would have been had she known that in a certain old-established, well-known City bank her husband had safely lodged

several thousand pounds ! She knew that he had "saved," for saving was an essential of Robert's well-being and peace of mind ; she knew that he had a certain sum in the *Savings Bank*, the which—compound interest and all—was no great matter ; but of any further and more important deposits she was as ignorant as the little Anne.

Robert, however, had no idea of starting upon an independent career. He foresaw that eventually the main part of the business of the Quaker firm must be his own. Hints had been thrown out by both partners—and they were quite old men now—that he would ere long have a share in the concern ; and "a share" once secured, Robert saw his way to something like undivided proprietorship in the future. So he plodded on, introducing many new branches of trade, all of which proved profitable ; acting often entirely on his own responsibility, receiving from his subordinates the deference and obedience due to the masters themselves, and retaining a higher and higher salary, together with certain bonuses awarded by the firm, in recognition of increase of business directly due to his keenness of perception and fertility of resource, and patiently waiting till the day should arrive when, as junior partner, he might lay the foundations of that vast fortune which long years ago he had vowed to himself to accumulate.

Catherine believed that his income amounted to little more than £250 a-year ; and on the strength of increased means, she had kept one young servant for the last few years ; but they still lived in the same humble little house, and exercised all due economy, and put a trifle from month to month into the *Savings Bank*.

So he smiled—that curious, half-cynical smile, which always suggests to the beholder some under-current of thought unrevealed—and said simply, "Many men who begin life as I did have not done nearly so well for themselves in one-and-twenty years ; and I may as well tell you I look for an increase before long. Only, as everything in life is uncertain, I don't care to dwell upon it ; and of course you must perceive that it would be the greatest folly to launch out or to make the least change, at present, in our mode of living."

"I should like to get into a better neighbourhood. This one has deteriorated sadly since we first came here ten years ago. I should not like our little Anne to grow up here; for though our own house is neat and nice, and we keep ourselves to ourselves, still the surroundings are sordid and altogether undesirable. Besides, the air is not so good as it used to be, and we are built in now on every side."

"Where should you like to live?" asked Robert, as seriously as if he meant to look out for a new residence immediately.

"Really, I don't know, dear. Whatever pleased you would please me, I dare say. It must not be far out of town, because of your business; but I am sure it would do you good to come home of an evening to a fresher air, shut up as you are in a close atmosphere all day. I have thought—supposing, that is, we made up our minds to move—of Hackney, or else of Camden Town, or perhaps Haverstock Hill. But I think my highest flight of ambition is a house in Canonbury Square."

"Ah, well! we shall see what we shall see!" said Robert, sententiously; and again that strange half-smile broke slowly over his grave features. "And so to-morrow is our wedding-day. Well! we are both ten years older since we took each other for better, for worse."

"And twenty years since we first looked over the same hymn-book at Salter's Hall. Why, Robert, we have belonged to each other for just half our lives. And I have been thinking —"

"What have you been thinking?—that we have had about enough of each other in these twenty years?"

"Now, Robert! how unkind! You know that I could think nothing of the sort. I was thinking that we might as well keep our wedding-day to-morrow; in a small way, of course!"

"Shall we give a dinner-party, or go and be married over again? Or do you want a present, Mrs. Wreford?"

"No, I don't care about a present, Robert. What I thought was that you and I and the child might take a little trip into the country. If it were only to Greenwich or to Kew; Ramsgate or Margate would be too far, I suppose?"

"You and Anne may go, if you please; I don't mind for once. It will not cost much. You can take some sandwiches in a basket, and so avoid the expense of an inn-dinner."

"Go without *you*!" And a flush of vexation came over Catherine's face. "No, indeed! that would be a strange fashion of celebrating one's wedding-day. I thought you might give your wife and child a day, or a part of a day, for once. We have never had a holiday in all these ten years, and scarcely any in the other ten years during which we were engaged."

Robert began to laugh. "Now really, Catherine, you are talking like John Gilpin's spouse, who complained that in twice ten tedious years he and she 'no holiday had seen.' Why don't you at once continue—

" 'To-morrow is our wedding-day,
And we will then repair
Unto the Bell at Edmonton,
All in a chaise and pair'?"

"I have no objection; the Bell at Edmonton, if it still exists, will serve our turn as well as any other place. Only it ought to have been thought of a little sooner."

"Most decidedly! But, as I said before, if you and the child would like a little outing, I should wish you to take it. My going with you is quite out of the question, for I have very important business in the City to-morrow, and an appointment that may not be broken for the middle of the day."

"Nay, now!" said Catherine, vexed, but still not hopeless of gaining her point; "if I remind you of Mrs. Gilpin, you do not remind me of Mr. Gilpin, for he at once replied—

" 'I do admire
Of womankind but one,
And you are she, my dearest dear,
Therefore it shall be done.'

Now, if you will be as amiable as John Gilpin, I will undertake that you shall find, that though on pleasure *I* am bent, I have 'a frugal mind!' To begin with, we need not hire a chaise and pair, and we shall not want any

wine, only a little milk for Anne. Remember, too, that the excellent citizen thought it quite out of the fitness of things that on his wedding-day he should dine in one place and Mrs. Gilpin in another."

"All very fine, my dear Catherine, but I cannot go out of town to-morrow on any pretence whatever; indeed, I shall be late home to-morrow night, and you had better not wait supper for me."

"Then am I to understand that you deny my request? that you mean to let the day go by like any other day?"

"Of course I shall let the day pass like any other day, with this difference, perhaps, that I shall be rather more busy than usual. There! it is of no use looking in that way, Catherine; you know how I object to the observance of any kind of anniversary. And we are both too old for sentiment."

"I don't know what you call 'sentiment,'" she returned, with sudden courage, determined to speak plainly for once. "I must tell you, Robert, that—that you might be a little kinder to me."

She spoke with passion, and Robert sat as one dumb-founded, staring at his wife, who seemed suddenly transformed from a dove into an eagle. "Whatever can you mean?" he exclaimed at length, when he recovered from the sudden surprise; "I—might—be—kinder—to you! When was I ever unkind, pray?"

Then Catherine poured out the pent-up emotion of years. "You are not," she said, "unkind in the common acceptation of the word; you don't ill-treat me, you don't often scold me. I dare say the world calls you a very good husband. But you *are* unkind—you are cruel, even; you chill me to death with your indifference. Don't you see I am hungry and thirsty for a little tenderness—just a little affection, such as a wife commonly expects from her husband? My heart is starved—or at least it would be, but for the child."

"I have not the least idea what you mean! I did not know I had ever failed to evince a proper amount of affection. I hate sentiment! I hate nonsense! I hate *a scene*! I think you must have taken leave of your senses! And all because I must attend to my

duties, instead of escorting you to Edmonton, or Margate, or somewhere else! Why should we begin to notice our wedding-day now? We never have done so! You must have been reading trashy novels; I fancied you had more sense. Heigho! all women are alike, I suppose."

"I have not read a novel for months," replied Catherine, resentfully. "And it is not because you do not grant this request that I am wounded; it is because your refusal is indicative of your general feeling towards me. Robert, you loved me *once*. If you had been as cold as you are now twenty years ago, we should never —you and I—have had a wedding-day to keep; I should never have owned to loving you—nay! I should have had no love to own if you had treated me then with the indifference of the last few years!"

"I am very sorry, Catherine," he returned, gravely, "that we understand each other so ill. I did think I had married a sensible, rational woman; I never imagined you wanted to live a life of romance. As it is, I am afraid I shall continue to disappoint you, for I cannot give you what is not mine to give. It is not in my nature to make a fuss; I cannot kiss, and fondle, and say pretty things perpetually, and call you pet names, as some men do. I dare say I was more demonstrative once; men are generally more foolish at twenty than at forty. Once for all, Catherine, I *can't* gush! So don't worry yourself and me for nothing."

"I don't want you to 'gush,'" she answered, bitterly. "Oh, Robert, I don't want to be fussed with; I don't want to be called pet names."

"What *do* you want?"

"I am afraid I cannot make you understand. I am afraid I cannot put into words my exact meaning. I can only say I want my husband to love me! I am weary of giving and giving, and getting back no adequate return."

"Good heavens, Catherine!" It was very rarely that Robert ever uttered such an exclamation. I doubt if his wife had ever heard it from his lips before; but he was so excited now that he scarcely knew what he said. "You bring a very grave charge against me! What does it

mean? What poison is rankling in your mind? Are you jealous?"

"Of whom?"

"Nay, I know not! I am not acquainted with half-a-dozen women in the world, and I should not care if I never saw any of them again. All I have to give is yours, Catherine, but I cannot give you more. I ask you, of whom are you jealous?"

"And I answer, of no one! I never could be jealous, Robert. I could never be so despicable. I am not compounded of that wretched mixture of selfishness and exactation and vanity and littleness, which breeds the contemptible thing called jealousy. I trust you, and I respect myself. If I did not—if I knew that you were *not* to be trusted—I should let you go. I am not clever as you are, Robert; I cannot always control my feelings; but I am too proud a woman to be jealous. So dismiss that thought from your mind; I cannot conceive how it ever entered there."

"Simply from your own inexplicable upbraidings. I never knew before that you were in any way dissatisfied. You must have some ground for your strange doubts of me, and, as I am not conscious of any conjugal shortcomings, I thought some one—that silly Mrs. Powell, perhaps—had been putting things into your head."

"No one could put 'things' into my head. But I see it is vain to prolong this conversation. Slowly and sadly it dawns upon me that we should come no nearer to each other if we talked for a month."

"We should in all probability drift farther apart, for I shall be out of all patience if you go on in the same strain much longer. If you cannot in so many words tell me what it is that you do not receive from me that a wife should receive from her husband, I think the sooner we cease this unsatisfactory discourse the better."

"If in your heart of hearts you do *not* know, it is in vain that I try to explain the grievance."

"Most solemnly then, I declare to you, Catherine, that I do *not* know; it never entered into my mind that you were otherwise than a happy, contented wife. I'll try to make more fuss of you; I'll kiss you every morning

before I go away, if I am not in too much hurry, if that will please you."

"No, no!" she answered quickly; "kisses are nothing in themselves; a kiss of duty is no more than a kiss of ceremony. Nothing of that sort is of any value, unless it be the spontaneous expression of true affection, the outward and visible sign of an inward and inexpressible love."

"I protest, you talk in a language which is new to me. It sounds like a nonsensical love-story. I am sorry I cannot enter into your fine poetic feelings, but I cannot! I cannot go back twenty years, and play the boy-lover again. My life is too full of hard work for mere sentiment, too crowded with real matter-of-fact difficulties for poetic ravings. Let this folly end."

"Very well! Since you estimate it as folly, I will say no more about it. I think I may promise never more to offend in the same way; only remember that love, though many waters of affliction cannot quench it, may yet be starved to death! Do not reproach me if you find that I have taken a leaf out of your own book, and tutored myself to dull content and stolid indifference."

"I won't reproach you! Only be as good a wife as you have been ever since we were married, and I shall be perfectly satisfied. There, don't cry. We shall go on all right, I dare say, when you have got this queer crotchet out of your brain. Come, let us go to bed; I am dreadfully tired, and I must catch the eight o'clock 'bus in the morning; for, as I told you, I have a busy day before me, and Mr. Hankins is away in the country, and Mr. Bright is ill."

From that hour Catherine never tried to make her husband understand what it was she missed in her married life, and he soon forgot that she had ever complained. Days and weeks and months passed on, and Robert became more and more absorbed in his business, more deeply intent on the schemes which he pursued, and more taciturn and pre-occupied during the few evening hours that he spent at home. Anne loved her father, but she was afraid of him; she took great care never to offend him, though she did not mind much about pleasing him

beyond what was absolutely demanded of her. Catherine was more and more wrapt up in her child, but a dreary coldness was at her heart. She was changed towards Robert ; and yet Robert never once suspected any change, much less perceived it—never once discerned that his Catherine was no longer the intensely-loving, devoted Catherine of old days, that something in her said continually—

“Thou hast lost the key of my heart’s door,
Lost it ever, and for ever—
Ay, for evermore.”

But Catherine had not schooled herself so thoroughly as she imagined. The ideal Robert Wreford was dead and buried, yet she was a good wife still. Only all her passionate love was given to her child—Robert’s daughter had his share as well as her own ;—and he never guessed it.

CHAPTER IV.

BUSINESS OF IMPORTANCE.

FIVE years had rolled away, and Anne had passed her twelfth birthday. Those who regarded her partially declared that she was growing up “quite a fine girl.” Those who cared nothing about her were wont to observe, as she passed along, “There goes Anne Wreford. What a great, overgrown girl she is, and how *plain* she gets !”

And that this was a true bill, I am bound to own ; my heroine was plain, and as awkward as any overgrown girl bordering upon her teens. Even her mother wished she would not run up quite so fast and develop so many angles ; and her father scarcely ever saw her without finding some fault with her deportment or her appearance. She stooped ; she poked her chin ; instead of walking like a young lady, she strode about like a grenadier ; she had

no idea what to do with her arms ; and she was painfully conscious of her large, flat feet, and of frocks that seemed perpetually shrinking up to her knees. She had not inherited the good looks of either parent. Catherine, who still retained her soft-tinted, clear complexion, and an abundance of dark-brown, glossy hair, was held to be a remarkably handsome woman of her age ; Robert, though his hair had grown grey and scant, and though there were hard lines on his face and a few wrinkles in his forehead, was always spoken of as a fine-looking, robust specimen of manhood. But for the too prominent cheek-bones, derived from his Aberdonian grandmother, he might even have deserved to be called handsome.

And yet, curiously enough, Anne was like her father ; the features, excepting, indeed, the hard cheek-bones, were quite dissimilar ; the eyes were not of the same colour ; the whole contour of the face was absolutely different ; and yet any one who saw the two together would be sure to say, "There go Robert Wreford and his daughter !" The likeness, of course, lay in a certain expression, which it was sometimes difficult to catch, and which struck you more at first sight than subsequently. Her father was vexed at her plainness, for he considered that women should be ornamental as well as useful.

To her mother, however, she was beautiful ; Catherine would not have changed her for all the lovely blondes and brunettes in the universe ; and the child knew that she was all in all to her mother, and clung to her accordingly.

Again it was a dull November evening, bright within and dismal without, and Catherine and Anne were sitting quietly in the warm and lighted parlour, expecting every moment to hear Mr. Wreford's latch-key in the door. They were living at Hackney now, not far from "*Loddiges*," for Robert had come home one winter's day, and said to his wife, "Mother"—he seldom called her Catherine in those days—"I have given our landlord six months' notice ; we must move out of this in June, so you had better begin to look about you as soon as the weather grows a little milder. And I have decided on living at Hackney, if we can find a house to suit." And "a house to suit" was fortunately just then vacant. It was

larger than they really required, but the rent did not exceed the sum to which Robert had settled to go, and there was a nice large garden, and even a greenhouse, though rather in a shattered condition. Anne was in her ninth year when they left the old house where she was born; consequently they had been living at Hackney for three years and five months.

It was a comfortable room in which the mother and daughter were sitting, pleasant and airy in summer, with its old-fashioned vine-shaded window; snug and bright in winter, with its roomy fireplace, and its southern aspect.

Catherine was busy with a warm dress of Anne's, which she was letting out and letting down, to the best of her ability, for it was not by any means worn out; it had "grown too small" for her, its owner said.

"Do you not think you have grown too large for it?" corrected her mother, smiling.

"Well, I suppose that is it," replied Anne, good-temperedly, for she never objected to be set right by "mother," though she secretly resented any interference on the part of her father, declaring that he liked nothing better than to snub her. And Anne, with the rest of the world, objected to the unpleasant process.

"Mother!" pursued the girl, shutting up her atlas and her exercise-book, for she had been preparing her lessons for the morrow, "can't I have a new French merino this winter? I saw one in a window the other day that was exactly the colour and the shade I wanted. And all the girls in my class are getting new winter dresses. Laura Meadows has a lovely blue, cost four-and-sixpence a yard, and trimmed ever so much with beautiful black velvet."

"I cannot promise you so expensive a dress, my dear; but if I can manage it, you shall have a new merino for Christmas. What was the colour of the piece you liked?"

"A sort of dull crimson, mother. I fancy I shall look less ugly in that than in a brighter or lighter shade."

"My child, I do not think you are ugly. You are not beautiful, I must confess, except to me; and I had rather see your face than look at the finest picture ever painted; but you certainly are *not* ugly. And after all, you know,

my dear, 'beauty is but skin-deep,' and 'handsome is that handsome does.'"

"Ah, yes; but for all that, I should like to be handsome. I hate to be a great gawky thing, all legs and arms like a crab; and I detest dancing-day. The girls tell me I hop about like a sulky bear on a hot floor."

"That is very rude of them and very unkind. Do not mind them, my dear; they will leave off making such speeches when they see you are not vexed and put out. Be above all that sort of thing, Anne, my darling."

"I wish I need not learn dancing! And I wish I might begin music! What do you think, mother? There are only three other pupils—and they are quite little things—at Miss Rose's, who do not learn the piano. Maud Cooper plays beautifully, and she is only nine months older than I am. Why cannot I be like the rest, mother?"

"Your father objected when I spoke to him about it. He said accomplishments were unnecessary at your age; only you must learn to dance, that you might know how to walk, and to hold yourself properly."

"Just like father! I believe he enjoys fretting me."

"Hush, Anne! I cannot have you speak of your father in that tone. You do not understand him." And to herself Catherine added, "Neither do I! or is it that I understand him but too well?"

"But, mother!" persisted the girl, "it is aggravating to be so unlike other people! Everybody who is anybody can play the piano, and most young ladies draw and paint, and talk French. Every now and then when the girls and I are out of friends, as we call it at school, they jabber French to each other, and I know it is about me."

"My dear Anne, if you indulge such silly feelings, you will be very uncomfortable. And if I were you, I would never be 'out of friends' with any one. Nothing is ever gained by bad temper."

"Well, perhaps not! But everybody is not as sweet-tempered as you are, mother dear; and I take after father, you know."

"Your father has great control over his temper, Anne. I do not think I have seen him angry, really angry, more

than half-a-dozen times since we were married. If you take after him, you will learn to keep yourself in order."

"Mother, don't you think a person may be horridly disagreeable without exactly losing his temper? I would as soon be cross outright as always *seem* displeased—or not pleased, which is almost the same thing, I suppose. When father looks at me—you know how—so cold and hard and grave-like, I always begin to ask myself what I have done, or left undone, that perhaps may anger him. I am sure Sunday is the worst day of the week, instead of the best; I get so many reprimands!"

"Now, Anne, if you talk in that way any longer, I shall send you to bed before your father comes in. The commandment says 'Honour thy father' as well as 'Honour thy mother.' No, my dear, I do not wish to be answered. Are you sure you know all your lessons?"

"Yes, I know them well. They are chiefly repetitions, for to-morrow is our monthly examination. But I have a horrid sum to do for Mr. Robson. I could not make it come right in schooltime."

"Suppose we do it together! In what rule is it?"

"In that nasty 'compound long division.' Just one figure throws the whole sum wrong."

"Let us go over it. You had better copy the proposition afresh; you will never do any good with such a confused muddle of figures. Now then, let us begin."

Anne did not dislike arithmetic, and she rather enjoyed working out the sum with her mother. But it was a long one, and even Catherine made one error in subtraction. It was a full hour before the proof was achieved, and the answer fairly written out. Then both mother and daughter started to find how late it was. It was past Anne's bedtime, and long past Mr. Wreford's hour for reaching home.

"How late father is," said Anne, with a yawn. "And oh, mother, listen to the sleet against the window-panes."

Mrs. Wreford assiduously replenished the fire, and swept up the hearth. Robert's slippers had been warming ever since seven o'clock. Then she put away her work, and busied herself with a little fancy knitting for a counterpane, every now and then stopping and listening

when something rattled, thinking it might be her husband at the door, with his key already in the latch. Catherine rivalled Robert now in outward coldness and reserve, but practically she was as good a wife as ever. Though she had now two servants, there were certain things which she always did for her husband with her own hands. Anne still lingered, and her mother did not send her upstairs; she did not, perhaps, care to be left alone with her increasing anxiety; for it was almost ten o'clock, and still no Robert, and he ought, by good rights, to have been at home by eight.

Some one tapped at the parlour-door. It was cook, with a very serious face. "Please, ma'am, had I not better send up the supper? It will be quite spoilt."

"No, no, cook. Your master will be here directly; he cannot be long now."

"As you please, ma'am, but the cutlets are getting quite sodden."

"Anne, child, go to bed," said Catherine presently. "You will never be up in time for school to-morrow morning. You ought to be fast asleep at this moment."

"Do let me stay a little longer, mother dear; I'll run upstairs the moment we hear the latch go." And as Catherine made no answer, Anne interpreted silence to mean consent. But a "little longer" grew into another half-hour, and then there was a loud ring at the bell. It could not be Mr. Wreford, because he always carried a key and admitted himself. Catherine turned pale and trembled. In spite of all the coldness that had grown up between them, Catherine was Catherine still; and in that supreme moment, he was to her as the dearly-loved Robert of her youth. He had taken lately to come home by train, it was most convenient from Fenchurch Street. Had there been any accident on the rail? She ran herself to the door, she could not bear another minute's suspense.

As she opened the hall-door, in came the driving rain and sleet; it was a miserable night. On the steps stood a tall man, with a macintosh cape over his shoulders.

"Is this Mr. Wreford's?" he inquired.

"Yes, come in!" gasped Catherine, almost breathless

with solicitude. "What do you want? I am Mrs. Wreford."

"I'm one of the porters of Bright and Hankins, ma'am, and your master, he sended me with a message. And a nasty night it is to be away from one's own fireside."

Catherine's present anxiety was relieved. If Robert had sent a message, there was nothing the matter. What had the wet, grumbling porter to say? Shaking himself on the hall-mat like a drenched water spaniel, he replied, "No! Nothing ain't the matter. Only Mr. Wreford he's off to Croydon, and he won't come home to-night, as stands to sense he can't. And he tells me to come up here to 'Ackney, and say to his missis as she wasn't to expect him till she seed him."

"You are sure nothing has happened?"

"I couldn't say as nothing hadn't happened," replied the man, surlily. "I shouldn't think any man in his senses would go out to Croydon—West Croydon, too—such a night as this, for less than life or death. But nothing have happened to your master if that's what you mean. He was putting the books in the safe when the message come, and says he, 'Richards, I've got to go to West Croydon immediate; go you by next train to 'Ackney, and tell Mrs. Wreford I sha'n't be home to-night.'"

"Did he say when he would probably be home?"

"No, he didn't. And I never asks no questions. He ain't one to ask questions of, he ain't. He won't be home to-night, and he's gone to West Croydon, and that's all I know. And I've got to get to Mile End before I turn in after a hard day's work, and a nice night it is to be travelling."

"Go into the kitchen and have some supper before you set off again," said Catherine. And the man, nothing loth, complied, and soon made havoc with the cutlets which had been intended for Mr. Wreford. Anne went to bed, first stipulating that she should sleep with her mother.

Left alone, Catherine sat brooding over the dying embers. The rain had ceased, but the wind howled mournfully around the house, whistled through keyholes,

and made a great thunderous noise up in the chimneys. When the servants had gone upstairs all was still. Catherine felt very sad and solitary, and none the better for the fright she had had. She was speculating, naturally enough, as to the nature of the business which had taken her husband thus suddenly to Croydon. They had no friends there ; she had never, to the best of her recollection, heard him speak of any one who was living there ; but then, Robert never spoke of business matters at home, and Catherine knew no more what went on in those dark, mysterious Fenchurch Street offices and warehouses, or at "the works," than she knew of the interior of a Turkish harem. It was of no use racking her brain. Robert had gone suddenly to Croydon, and no doubt would as suddenly return. No accident had happened to him, therefore she need not disquiet herself in vain. Nevertheless, she felt uneasy, and it was almost midnight when at last she went up to her chamber, and found Anne in Robert's place, buried in the deep, undisturbed sleep of childhood.

She looked out, and the stars were shining, though the night was still boisterous, and wet at intervals. The bright lustrous orbs in the dark sky shining so serenely seemed to whisper comfort to her, and somehow, as she gazed upward, there came into her mind the words : "For ever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven." And as she whispered them to herself she grew calmer and less sorrowful. As the stars shone out in that wild night sky, even so shine ever God's promises in the time of tribulation ; and she recalled the lines she had sung so many times, both at home and in the congregation to which she belonged :

" For His mercies shall endure,
Ever faithful, ever sure ! "

And thus cheered and quieted, she soon fell asleep by her daughter's side.

The next day, there was no news of Robert ; but by the last post came a few lines from Croydon, written evidently in furious haste. They only said :—" Dear Wife,—Business of moment detains me. Do not expect me till you see me. I am quite well.—Your affectionate husband, ROBERT WREFORD."

He was quite well; he would come home when he could. There was no reason why she should distress herself. She must make herself quite happy in Robert's absence, with Robert's daughter. Still she wondered greatly, and in spite of herself continually, what *could* be keeping him out at Croydon?

CHAPTER V.

“WHEN THE CAT'S AWAY, THE MICE WILL PLAY.”

SEVERAL days passed quietly, and no further news of Robert Wreford reached his wife and daughter. Catherine being assured that her husband was safe and well, waited patiently till it should be his sovereign pleasure to return to Hackney, or to vouchsafe another short epistle. Anne, with the natural restlessness and pardonable curiosity of her age, was fidgety and expectant, and rushed in daily from school with the eager inquiry: “Have you heard anything of father yet, mother?” and Catherine could only answer in the negative.

“Where *can* he be? What can he be about? Mother dear, don't you want to know what is keeping him away all this time?” demanded Anne on the afternoon of the fourth day, which happened to be Saturday. “Surely he will come home to-night?”

“I really cannot tell,” was Catherine's grave response. “I know no more than you do, Anne. You saw your father's note, and there has been no other communication.”

“The note said nothing—just nothing!”

“Indeed it did! It told me that your father was not ill, and that he would come home as soon as the business which detained him at Croydon should be accomplished.”

“I wonder what the business is, don't you, mother?”

“No! I do not wonder at all, because I am tolerably

certain it has nothing to do with us. It is something which concerns the firm, of course; we have no affairs of our own. But it will seem strange if he be away all day to-morrow; he has never been from home on a Sunday since he went to Liverpool for a week, eleven years ago, when you were a little baby, Anne, my dear."

"Why, mother, you and I shall have to go to church by ourselves! I think it will be very nice, you and I so snug together. Besides, it will be a change."

"Something quite new, certainly. But I had rather have father at home as usual; you and I are snug together, as you say, every week-day evening till eight o'clock. And he will be missed in the congregation, too."

The Wrefords by this time had dissolved their connection with Salter's Hall, and had joined a well-known Nonconformist church in their immediate neighbourhood, and every Sunday morning and evening, full five minutes before service commenced, father, mother, and daughter might be found in their accustomed place, and every Thursday evening Catherine and Anne were to be seen in the lecture-room, where smaller assemblies of the faithful were wont to meet, and where prayer-meetings generally and church-meetings regularly were held. Robert, though inactive as regarded church work, was, nevertheless, a respected member of the Mare Street conventicle, and he was even solicited to fill the diaconal office when a sudden vacancy occurred; but he firmly, though politely, declined the honour and responsibility, giving as his reason that his time was not at his own disposal, save on Sundays and Saturday evenings, when he found it incumbent on him to take a thorough rest from labour of every kind. "Let those who enjoy leisure during the week give themselves to good works on the Sabbath-day," he urged, in reply to the senior deacon's mild remonstrance, "for work, however holy, *is* work, and takes more or less from brains and muscle."

Which was true enough, especially as applied to persons who have quite passed their youth, and entered upon middle life. Overtasked, well-wrought men of business need the seventh-day repose as much as, if not more than, cabmen, cab-horses, and railway porters. Robert Wreford,

we think, had a valid excuse when he declined to be elected deacon of the Mare Street Congregational Church.

Catherine felt that, as a member of a Christian church, she ought to be doing something, and, therefore, she consented to become a tract distributor, and to conduct a mothers' meeting, which was convened on every alternate Monday afternoon, and Robert did not object. It was respectable to be connected with church work, he decided, and he liked his wife to be held in consideration by the people with whom they were associated. Besides, women, as a rule, wanted some interest beyond their own sphere of home, and nothing could be safer, more creditable, and less expensive than this sort of pious recreation, so long as it was not carried to an unreasonable extent. So, on the morrow, Mrs. Wreford would certainly have to answer a host of questions touching her husband's non-appearance in the pew at both the services. And she could only say he was from home and detained by business. She hoped no one would be in an inquisitorial frame of mind, for though she was well content herself to be in ignorance, she did not like the notion of acknowledging, or, at least, implying to her neighbours how very little she was in her husband's confidence. It was humiliating not to be assured of Robert's present whereabouts, not to know the nature of the business which detained him, not to have the least idea when he might be expected home. Catherine would not object to a quiet Sunday, with only Anne for her companion: indeed, she secretly echoed Anne's sentiment as to the "niceness" of being "so snug together;" but, on the whole, she wished, for several most obvious reasons, that Robert might put in an appearance that very evening.

The hours, however, wore on, and Mr. Wreford did not arrive, neither was any letter received from Croydon or elsewhere. The mother and daughter waited tea for an hour or more, and chop and eggs and ham were ready to be cooked the moment the master came. Then Catherine took care that a dainty little supper should be prepared, and she put clean towels in Robert's dressing-room, and set his slippers to warm, and looked out his Sunday clothes, still expecting his return. For though Catherine

told herself repeatedly that the old passionate love was cold and dead, she never omitted any wifely duty; if she could not pour out upon her world-hardened husband all that wealth of affection which was a part of her very self, she could, at least, minister to his comforts, and serve him, as far as possible, with her own hands, and with that thoughtful, ever considerate care which a loving and truly womanly woman only knows how to exercise. In fact, she would have been utterly miserable but for this personal service, which was, indeed, the outlet of those tenderer feelings that she had striven so long to suppress.

So she felt a dreary pleasure as she went about arranging all that Robert could possibly require, should he presently come in. The best coat, which had been duly brushed on Monday morning, was taken from the drawer, and shaken out from the creases, and hung up ready for wear; one of Robert's best lawn pocket-handkerchiefs was laid on the dressing-table: his wife would much have liked to scent it, but he strenuously objected to scents as foolish and finical, and altogether wasteful. Then she took away the shirt she had laid out, and substituted one that had a better appearance because the folds of the front were ironed more evenly; then she dusted his Sunday boots and placed them in the accustomed spot; last of all, she went into the kitchen, to satisfy herself that the supper was being prepared exactly as she had ordered. She and Anne would have been fully content with bread and cheese or butter, or a plain milk-pudding; but Robert's appetite must be studied, and he must sit down to dainty dishes, at once light, nourishing, and palatable. Though Catherine herself cooked the meal, and burnt her face and her fingers, and lost her own appetite over the fire, she felt herself fully rewarded if Robert declared that he had "quite enjoyed his dinner."

The supper was ready, and was kept waiting even as the tea had been, and, after all, had to be served up to Catherine and Anne alone; for Anne had got into bad habits during her father's absence, and sat up every night to bear her mother company. Usually, she went to bed at half-past eight, and only supped with her parents, as an especial treat, on the Sunday evening. It was late before

they could make up their minds that there would be no arrival that evening. Anne felt in her inmost heart rather elate ; she thoroughly enjoyed being "all alone with mother ;" but the mother herself, in spite of the stern schooling of the last five years, was pained and sad. It was not kind of Robert, she kept saying to herself, while she was busied in putting away her work-basket and such books as were not supposed to be profitable Sunday reading. Nay, it was positively unkind ; it placed her in an undignified position before her servants, knowing literally nothing of "the master's" movements ; it would be a vexation to-morrow when people hoped Mr. Wreford was not unwell ; and, worst of all, it proved how little Robert thought of her feelings, how entirely he disregarded her just claims as a married woman. She felt very sore when—the putting away all done—she stood thoughtfully before the smouldering embers of the dying fire. Anne was at her side ; they were quite ready to go upstairs.

"It is of no use waiting any longer, mother," said Anne, gaping as she spoke. "Father won't come to-night. I wonder when he *will* come ?"

"The last train is scarcely in yet, and the omnibus has not passed, I know ; but you had better go to bed, my child—you are looking quite pale and fagged."

"Oh, mother, I must be sure that father will not come, else I shall not know which room to go to ; and you would not like to sleep alone, you know."

"And you would not like to miss your opportunity ! Well, in about ten minutes we may be quite certain. Hark ! is not that the omnibus ? Is it not stopping at our gate ?"

But the omnibus rolled steadily on its way, and directly afterwards they could hear the rumble of the train from the City as it recommenced its journey towards Kingland Road. If Mr. Wreford came at all, he would be in the house in less than five minutes.

"I think we may go now, my dear," said Catherine, taking off the coals. "Where can your father be ?"

"He cannot be staying all this while at Croydon, I should imagine. Mother, I have been thinking of something ! I want to go somewhere to-morrow."

"My dear, to-morrow will be Sunday. What are you dreaming about?"

"Oh, I don't mean going to any place of entertainment, *of course*. What I thought was, that as we should have only ourselves to please, we might do as we liked; and I do so want to go to some strange church. Let us desert Mare Street to-morrow for once, there's a dear, good little mother."

"I am sure I do not know what to say to it, Anne," returned Catherine, feeling, however, that it was a loophole through which it would be pleasant to creep away from her own difficulties; for she shrank, she scarcely knew why, from filling her accustomed place in the congregation in her husband's absence. "I should have no objection, but I am afraid your father might not like it. He makes a great point, as you know, of being regular in attendance at our own place of worship."

"Regular! Yes, certainly! But going elsewhere, just for once in a way, is not being irregular. I do so want to go to church for once; I want to see how it is different from chapel."

The Wrefords, I must explain, were rather old-fashioned Dissenters, and always spoke of conventicles as *chapels*, and of Episcopalian sanctuaries as *churches*, and Anne naturally followed the terminology of her parents. I very much object to the distinction, as being sectarian and meaningless. "Chapel" savours of Rome and of the Establishment more than is agreeable to pronounced Nonconformists, and a chapel, either Roman or Anglican, is necessarily dependent upon, or contained within, some mother church, which a Nonconformist place of worship never is, except, indeed, in the case of what are called mission stations; and even then the daughter church or chapel becomes free and independent as soon as ever it finds itself to be self-supporting. Our temples and tabernacles—I speak as a Dissenter—are essentially, and in the strictest sense, *churches*, whether regarded from a Scriptural point of view, or according to the actual signification of the phrase. You will understand, then, that I do not admit the term *chapel* as applied to any building in which Nonconformist congregations assemble, though I

may use the word occasionally, as spoken by the Wreford family, who always talked about "going to chapel" as distinctively opposed to "going to church."

Now Catherine, from the circumstances of her education, and from mere force of association, was not quite so liberal-minded as one could have wished. In many of its aspects her character was singularly comprehensive, and her views broad and unprejudiced; but on questions of theology she lacked both breadth and grasp. Therefore, she answered, with much seriousness, "That will never do, my child; we ought to be steadfast to our own religion."

"But the religion is the same, I thought, only the service is different. Surely, mother, Church people are Christians and may hope to go to heaven?"

"Of course they are Christians, but—"

"Then, if they are Christians, why can't we worship with them? Why can't we be one in those things on which we agree, and leave those things on which we must disagree quite out of the question?" asked Anne earnestly, hitting all unconsciously one of the most crucial points on which true catholicity depends.

"My dear," returned her mother, slightly troubled, because through the thick dark haze of prejudice she perceived a faint glimmering of actual truth, "you are talking of what you cannot possibly understand. Your father and I are Dissenters, and you have been brought up a Dissenter: it does not become us to join hands with our enemies."

"But are Church people our enemies?" asked Anne, earnestly. "And if they are, is it joining hands with them to go to a single service? Mother, I want to go now more than ever! I am a Dissenter, of course; I think I always shall be one; but I should so like to see something that is quite outside Dissent."

"You are far too young to form a judgment of what you see, Anne."

"Yes, I know that. I don't want to form a judgment; I only want to see with my own eyes and hear with my own ears something different from the forms and ways to which I have been accustomed."

"Shall we go to the Methodist chapel in Hackney Road? That will be a change, and if it be a fine morning, as seems likely, I should like the walk."

"I had rather walk the other way, out into the country; besides, Methodists are very much like Independents, are not they? No, I want to go really to church, where they do the thing properly. Do let me have my own way, mother dear, only this once; who knows when we may have a Sunday to ourselves again?"

"I feel sure your father will not like it, Anne!"

"Oh, mother, he will not care. Why should he? Do be persuaded. I have so set my heart upon it; and you know you promised me a treat if I finished those doyleys within the month, and I put them all into your drawer the day before yesterday."

"Well, I must sleep upon it. I cannot decide hastily. We must on no account displease father in his absence; and, what is still more important, we must be careful not to do wrong. Now, my dear, I am going to bed, whether you are ready or not."

Anne, like a wise little woman, pressed the matter no further; something in her mother's face assured her that the victory would be her own. She said no more that night, nor even next morning, till breakfast being well over, she inquired, "Have you settled it, mother dear? Because, if we do go to church, we must make up our minds what church, and if we have a long walk before us, it is almost time to get ready."

"I have settled to do as you wish, my dear. I thought it over last night, after you were sound asleep, and I came to the conclusion that *for once*, as you so much desire it, there could be no harm in leaving our own place and going elsewhere. That point being decided, the next question is, *which* church shall we attend?"

"Any church but our own parish church."

"And why not the parish church?"

"Because it is so close that there may be other opportunities; besides, I have looked inside it more than once, and I want to see a place altogether new! Now, would it not be nice to go to St. Paul's?"

"To the Cathedral, do you mean, Anne?"

"To be sure, mother! Only think,—I am a Londoner born, and turned twelve years old, and have never yet seen the inside of St. Paul's, nor of Westminster Abbey! We cannot walk, but there is the omnibus will take us to the Bank, and that will do nicely. I should like to see how the City looks on a Sunday. I am afraid we cannot manage Westminster; it is *too* far, now that it is so late, —though I did think of it last night. Well, mother?"

Catherine was silent, not from displeasure, but from astonishment at the child's audacity, and yet something prompted her to yield to the suggestion. Anne had touched a secret spring, and her mother's feelings were strangely stirred. Almost unknown to herself, and certainly altogether unconfessed even to herself, Catherine had grown rather weary of the cut-and-dried system which she had followed ever since her early engagement to Robert Wreford—a system which pervaded not only her religious, but her social and common every-day life—for Catherine had not yet learned the grand truth that "earthlies and heavenlies" are in reality identical, and cannot be separated without incurring loss and pain. She felt a sudden desire to go out of the beaten track to-day; to get away from accustomed scenes, to see unknown faces and fresh aspects of things. She knew that if she went as usual into Mare Street she would be restless, dull, and dissatisfied, and Anne would be disappointed. There was no time to lose—the moments were passing, and it was necessary to say "no" or "yes" immediately. Of course she said "Yes," though with certain misgivings; and she felt very much like a naughty child, who plays pranks the moment the eyes of parents and teachers are withdrawn. All the while she was putting on her bonnet she was saying to herself—"What will Robert say? Oh! what *will* he think of it?" What other people might think or say, she did not care at all; it was only Robert's dictum, and the verdict of her own conscience, which caused her any anxiety; though she would have been pained to forfeit the good opinion of any Christian person whom she respected, she was supremely indifferent to the gossip of that *bête noire* of English society—the ubiquitous Mrs. Grundy.

Anne, on the contrary, was simply delighted. She could scarcely contain herself while she dressed for the unwonted "Sabbath day's journey;" and she was ready so many minutes before her mother that she began to grow impatient, and terribly afraid lest they should lose the omnibus, on which all depended.

They were on their way at last—Catherine agitated, though pleased; Anne altogether elate, and brimming over with undisguised satisfaction. Her cheerful, plain face filled her mother's heart with joy; at least there was one creature in the world to whose happiness she was essential. It was a bright Sunday morning—just frosty enough to dry the roads, and make them crisp and pleasant; the sun shone in a pale but cloudless sky; the air was full of the music of chiming and pealing bells; people were walking about in their best raiment; the streets were quiet; all things looked, as Anne said, as if they felt it was the best day of all the seven.

The omnibus journey was quickly accomplished. The Poultry and Cheapside did not take long to traverse, and they reached the Cathedral just as the bell was sounding out its last quick notes, and the clergy and choristers were entering the choir. Anne was lost in admiration of the vast edifice, and she could scarcely draw her breath whilst she listened to the loud pealing organ as the unseen organist played the opening voluntary. The service was altogether wonderful; the chants, the intoning, the great *Amens*, and, above all, the *Anthem*. It was nothing beyond the usual Cathedral service, but to Anne it seemed most heavenly. There was one drawback. Neither she nor her mother could follow the large Prayer-book which lay before them on the front of the stall. The Mass-book would have been equally intelligible. When all was over, they walked round the nave, and then made the best of their way back to the Bank, where they would take the Hackney omnibus. Neither of them said much till dinner was over, and Anne was cracking and peeling walnuts for two, before the fire. Then, when they were quite alone, she began:—

"Well, mother dear, you are not sorry that we went?"

"No, my child. I am glad that you had your pleasure. You were pleased, were you not?"

"I was, and I was not. First, I will tell you the things that pleased me, and afterwards those that displeased me—shall I?"

"That is just what I should like. I want to know exactly what you thought. I will tell you my own impressions afterwards."

"Well, then, I liked the novelty. I liked that huge dome. I liked the vastness of the place. I liked the music and the singing, and the *Amens* that swelled and died so solemnly. But I did not like the Cathedral quite—it was not what I fancied a cathedral would be; it was too light and showy. I thought I was going to say my prayers in 'A dim and mighty minster of old time,' as Mrs. Hemans' poem says."

"You must go to Westminster Abbey for that. St. Paul's is barely two hundred years old. Some day, if I can, I will take you down into the vaults of St. Faith's Church, which is the crypt of St. Paul's, and that is I don't know how many centuries old, for it belonged to the ancient Cathedral, which was burned in the great fire of London. How do you like saying your prayers out of a book?"

"Not at all! But then I could not follow the book. I soon lost my place, and I never found it again. So I listened, though I could not always make out what the minister said. Some of it seemed good, and some did not; and some of it was over and over again. But I think I should like to have a Prayer-book of my own. That prayer, giving thanks for *everything*, was grand; and it was nice for all the people to be saying together—'We have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep;' only I am afraid I should think nothing about it if I said it every Sunday, and perhaps twice every Sunday. It would get to be the same as the Multiplication or the Pence Table, which I do believe I could say through in my sleep, I have said it so many times. And those choristers might have behaved a little better; and why don't they have their shirts—no! I mean their surplices—washed oftener? Well, mother, I like church,

and I don't like it; but I am very glad we went. It is good to know about things, isn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said the mother, rather sadly, thinking how little she knew "about things," and a vague desire for mental expansion came to her heart, as it had sometimes come before, only to be repressed and chidden as a foolish spirit of discontent. But Anne Wreford, dearly as she loved her mother, was inly made of far other metal, and she had no small share of her father's ambition and perseverance; she would have energies equal to his, but hers would be pushed in various directions, while Robert's were principally, if not entirely, centred on one point—that being his success in life as a man of business. He was sacrificing all the sweetness and richness of his home life to that Moloch of success, which he had, even as a boy, set up in the altar of his heart. Anne, while she strove to reach the goal—whatever that goal might prove to be—would never do this; for, combined with her father's pride and ambition and sturdy persistency, she possessed her mother's strong affections and devoted, unselfish tenderness. Catherine, as she talked freely in the dusk of that November Sunday afternoon, saw dimly how different must be her child's future from her own, and she began to surmise—not for the first time—whether, as Anne grew older, and her views became more defined, and her will stronger, the father and daughter might not clash. They were at once too like and too unlike not to come, in the natural course of things, into antagonism.

As the twilight deepened, Catherine fell asleep, for she was tired with her morning's journey, and she was not quite as strong as in those days when Robert and she had thought little of a ten miles' jolt in a crowded omnibus, or a walk from the East End to the West End, and back again. Anne sat quietly looking into the fire, thinking about many things, and, among others, of the pleasantness of having her mother all to herself. The subdued glow from the grate shed a soft light on Catherine's face, as, with closed eyes and deep-drawn breath, she lay back in her own easy chair. Her daughter lovingly contemplated the sleeping countenance. "My own darling mother!"

said the girl to herself, "what a dear, sweet, good mother you are. I wonder if I was very naughty, making her go to St. Paul's this morning, for she would never have dreamed of going of herself, nor of going at all, if I had not bothered her into it. I am afraid it is not right to bother one's mother into doing what one wishes. Still, I am glad—yes! I am properly glad—that we did go, for I have seen fresh things, and learnt something; and Miss Rose says we should never let slip any opportunity of adding to our stock of information. I wish father would let me be as other girls are; he won't let me learn music nor French. I should not be taking dancing-lessons if it were not that everybody cried out at my awkwardness. And dancing I don't care much about. Dear me! everybody can't be graceful and pretty—and I am quite content to be the 'ugly duckling' of Miss Rose's school, if only people would not tease, and speak as if it were all my own fault that I am not handsome! Yet it must be nice to feel that one is looking pretty, and to be dressed with taste, and to move about gracefully;—ah! how pretty mother is, and she is old—quite old! she will be forty-five next birthday—I wonder how it feels to be as old as that! Perhaps when one comes to it, it may not seem old at all; for when I was a little girl, I used to think twelve or thirteen quite grown-up, and now I know I am a child still,—nothing like grown-up, though I do get before the elder girls in class. But mother is good as well as pretty; so patient and gentle and kind. When father is cross she keeps her temper, and she never snaps me, nor snubs me, even when I am, as I know, very tiresome. Dear, dear mother! I hope I shall always be a good girl to her; if I am not, I shall deserve to be hanged,—that is positive! And father—I love him too; I am sure I love him; he is very good, only so strict, and then he is so awfully clever and strong-minded, and he expects everybody to be the same. I wonder where he is now! How queer it is that he does not write. I think if I were married, I should like to know where my husband was, always. I do believe mother did not like to go to chapel to-day because she could not tell anybody where father was, nor why he did not come home for

Sunday—though that is nobody's business except our own. Only people will be curious and prying. Why! dear me! that sounds like some one at the door! I heard no ring, but I do believe there is some one coming in! One of those deacons, I dare say, wanting to know where we all were this morning. I hope it is Mr. Rucker, I will shock him by saying how much I enjoyed the Church service. What a pity to disturb mother!"

The door slowly opened, but no one was announced; the room was almost in shadow, for the fire had burnt very low, but Anne knew in a moment that it was her father who so quietly entered the room; he had come home at last, just when he was least expected. "What are you sitting in the dark for?" he said, as if he had been only an hour away. "Anne, you are scorching your eyes out of your head; ring the bell for lights and tea. Catherine, do you know it is almost half-past five? How do you suppose we are to get to chapel to-night?"

Catherine started up, half believing that she still dreamed. She could scarcely convince herself at first that Robert had been away. He poked the fire, he rebuked Anne, he addressed her exactly as if there had been no break in their intercourse. She knew intuitively that he would not be questioned, and so she only replied, rubbing her eyes—for she was startled out of a very sound sleep—"I did not know it was so late. I dropped off, and Anne did not wake me, knowing I was tired. We will have tea directly."

"What has made you tired? Has walking into Mare Street and eating your dinner been too much for you?"

"We have not been to Mare Street; we did not care to go without you, so we went to St. Paul's Cathedral. I thought I should like a change."

"No," said Anne, stonily, "it was I who wanted a change, and I teased mother into going."

"Oh, indeed!" was Mr. Wreford's answer. "I suppose it was a case of 'when the cat is away the mice will play!' I wonder you did not set off for Moorfields at once!"

CHAPTER VI.

A N N E ' S F U T U R E .

DAYS passed by, and more than a week elapsed, before Mr. Wreford thought proper to speak to his wife upon the subject of his mysterious absence. She on her part scrupulously avoided any reference to the affair; she never spoke of the note she had received by the Fenchurch Street porter, and she would not make any allusion to Croydon, where, as she supposed, Robert had remained for some days. If she had read the newspapers, she would have seen something which might possibly have suggested the truth; but she seldom saw a paper—literature of any kind being rather scarce at Ivyside—that being the name of the spacious, old, ivy-clad tenement in which the Wrefords now lived. It was not till the Monday evening, some days after Robert's return, that he deigned to speak openly. Then—Anne being gone to bed, and his own supper fairly over—he observed to his wife that he wished to have a little serious conversation with her. Catherine looked up rather startled, for she could not quite understand her husband's tone and manner, and she had studied him so long and so well that, generally speaking, the slightest word or gesture was sufficient to indicate to her the precise mood of the current hour. She felt rather nervous lest a lecture should be impending, though she could not, on the spur of the moment, remember any defalcation of duty, and it had seemed as if nothing was to be said respecting that Sunday morning's escapade, for which she was undoubtedly responsible.

"Very well," she replied; "shall I go on with my work, or put it away?"

"Put it away; I want your undivided attention. I am never sure that you thoroughly understand me when

your head is full of plaits and gathers. Stay a moment though—I am going to fetch up a bottle of port wine."

"Are you feeling poorly?"

"Not at all. I choose to have a glass of wine this evening, and I choose that you should have one with me."

He went down to the cellar, where his modest stock of port and sherry was duly stored; for he had ceased to be a total abstainer, and occasionally—though only occasionally—took a glass of wine with his dinner, or with the dessert which their own large garden furnished, on Sunday afternoon. Catherine sat and wondered; it was the first time in all his married life that Robert had proposed what might be called an impromptu glass of wine! But she folded up her work, put her basket on one side, and waited patiently till he came back again, with a dusty, cobwebbed bottle in his hand. With imperturbable gravity he dusted the bottle—he would not allow Catherine to touch it lest she should "break the crust;" he drew the cork, took two wine-glasses from the side-board, filled them, placed one before his wife, and said, as he lifted the other to his own lips, "Let us drink to the prosperity of the new firm in Fenchurch Street."

Catherine meekly obeyed, though she had no idea to what new firm reference was made. Robert emptied his glass with unwonted gusto, and proceeded: "I suppose you would like to know all about it?"

"Certainly, if there is anything to know about."

"Of course there is something to know about, and a very important something, too! Really, Catherine, I think you grow more stolid and impassive day by day. Any other woman would have wondered what it was that took me to Croydon and detained me so long."

"I did wonder—I never wondered more; but I thought you would speak if it were anything in which I had any concern, and if not, you would keep silence, as you usually do concerning your own affairs."

"You deserve to be left in ignorance. Your coolness and lack of interest almost tempt me to say nothing; but as you would pretty certainly hear of it from some other source, and that, perhaps, to-morrow, it is only in the fit-

ness of things that you listen now to what I have to tell you. The firm of Hankins and Bright is no more!"

"Will that make much difference to you?" she asked, by no means comprehending him. "How did it happen?"

"Jeremiah Bright is dead."

"Dead! Why, you never told me of his illness."

"There was no illness to tell you of. He was as well as usual till the day before he died; then he had a sort of stroke, and he knew the end was coming. He sent for me—Mr. Hankins was away at Brighton for his health; he has coddled for the last fifteen years—his partner never has. I went, of course—rushed off at once to London Bridge, and took the next train to Croydon. He lived there, you know."

"I did not know; but it does not matter. Go on."

"I found him quite conscious, his faculties as clear as ever, though his speech was difficult—he talked like a man with hot potatoes in his mouth. 'Prompt, as usual, Robert,' he said, when I reached his bedside. 'I've got my dismissal—I am sure of it; and I have no end of things to say to you, and small space of time wherein to say them. But, what I can't say, you'll find written down in black and white, in terms so plain that you cannot fail to understand.' And I could see, Catherine, as he spoke, that he was very near death; there was something on his poor, old wrinkled face that was not of this world."

"Poor old man! Had he no one with him? No relation, or near friend, I mean?"

"He had no relations, save very distant ones whom he did not care for. His wife died many years ago, and he had no child. His nearest of kin was a second or third cousin, whom he had never seen but once, and with whose behaviour he was displeased. So, as he had, you know, a good deal to bequeath, he naturally wanted an heir, and he could think of no one but myself!"

"Of you, Robert? You don't mean to tell me that that rich old man—you always said he *was* rich!—has left you all his money?"

"By no means, worse luck! He left legacies to all the first, second, and third cousins whose names he knew, and he left a lot to several charities. But he bequeathed to

me his entire share in the business, and also certain moneys, duly specified, on the condition that they should be invested in the business, and in no other way. Now, as Mr. Hankins is an invalid, and does not come to Fenchurch Street oftener than once a month, it follows that the whole power and responsibility rest in my hands. And after Mr. Hankins' decease, which cannot be far off, I shall be senior partner, sole partner if I choose; for poor Bright hinted that young Hankins—he is over fifty, by the way—was a miserable book-worm, who despised business, and would willingly dispose of his interest for a moderate consideration. So I bid fair to be monarch of all I survey in the old place at Fenchurch Street! And the business was never half what it is now, in old times. Poor Mr. Bright said as much before he died."

"Tell me, did he die that night you went to Croydon?"

"No, not till the Thursday night! I just went backwards and forwards to open the letters, and give orders, leaving the executive principally to Chisholm, who is my own pupil, and does things in my own way. On the Thursday I did not stay at the office longer than I could possibly help; I was back at Beech Green before five, and he died a little after eight."

"Were you with him?"

"No, I had just gone down to get a cup of tea. He seemed quite comfortable when I left him, only drowsy, very drowsy. He dropped off like an infant, the nurse said, never waking out of his sleep. There was just a little movement, not a struggle, a sort of sob or gasp, and before she could get to him, he was gone. The old woman was rather troubled that she had no death-bed experiences to relate."

"Death-bed experiences are of little consequence to survivors, where they have a whole long life of godly living to rest upon."

"You are quite right. Mr. Bright's exemplary Christian life speaks for itself. But he did say something to me—I could scarcely make out what it was, but I caught a few words about committing his soul to his Saviour—that was just as I was starting for the City in the morning.

And the night before, when he had taken what the doctor prescribed, he folded his hands, and repeated quite clearly, 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.'

"And now he is through the valley, and over the river, and safe on the other side," said Catherine, wiping away a tear. "I wonder how it feels, Robert, to be very near death, and to know it?"

Robert gave a slight shiver. "Do not speak of it," he said. "Life at the best is so short; if I live to be eighty, I shall never do half that it is in my mind to do! I have many volumes to write ere I shall be ready for the *FINIS* that death inscribes, sooner or later. What are threescore years and ten? What are fourscore years when there is so much to be done, and when there are always so many obstacles in one's way?"

"Do you not think that God may let us finish out yonder all the good works commenced below? This life is such a little bit of the life everlasting. These are only *beginnings*, these earthly experiences of ours. I often think we are like little children, still poring over mere letters and sounds, still struggling with the alphabet, while all the grand histories and beautiful poems are yet to be read."

"It may be so. But I hope I shall live to be old, and have my health and faculties to the last; for I see before me a splendid career. Ah! if I were only thirty-five instead of forty-five! I have never had a chance till now; my best years have been consumed in getting a good, firm foothold on the ground I mean to occupy."

"And that is much, surely? It is a grand thing to be sure of one's exact position. And—and—it is of no use toiling so heavily to gain riches. A moderate competency is enough for happiness."

"It is not enough for my happiness," he rejoined. Then, catching himself up, he added quickly, "Though I dare say a moderate competence is all I shall ever attain to, for when the legacies are paid off, and the estate finally settled, there will not remain any such great inheritance to myself."

" Still, the business will always bring in a fine income, I should think ? "

" With care it is sure to be productive. But do not rush to the conclusion that we are going to be immensely rich, because I have had a fortune left me, as people say."

" How much is it ? " Catherine thought she might ask so much of her own husband, seeing that she had taken him fifteen years before, for *richer* as well as for poorer, and God knew she had never lacked courage in contemplating the latter alternative. It was quite natural that she should wish to know the true state of Robert's finances and just expectations. But Robert replied coldly, " It is impossible to say at present; indeed, I should not care to say precisely what I am worth, or likely to be worth. I do not see that we need make any difference in our mode of life—any great difference, I should say. Of course, I shall wish you to spend a little more in the housekeeping, and I think—I cannot be quite sure yet—that I may be able to give you a small allowance for your own use and for Anne's—for your dress, for pocket-money, and for your private charities, I mean."

" Thank you. I shall like that very much. And cannot you afford to give Anne a downright good education ? She is learning but little for a girl of her age and capacity."

" She shall have a good, solid education. I have been thinking lately whether she might not be placed at a better school. I fancy those Miss Roses have rather a knack of smattering—they think too much of accomplishments. And those giddy girls, the Waltons, go there."

" There will be giddy girls in any school, but our Anne knows better than to follow their example. She will never be led away by foolish companions. And I think she has learned a great deal since she first became Miss Rose's pupil; she is being well grounded, I am sure."

" Mothers generally believe their own children to be paragons; I am afraid your testimony is too partial to be of much value. How old is Anne ? "

" She was twelve last birthday. Surely you do not forget the child's age ? "

" I was not quite certain whether she was turned twelve

or thirteen ! She is such a great awkward girl, all legs and arms, and she never seems to know how to dispose comfortably of the latter members ; she does not profit by her dancing master's instructions, that is certain ! You women have always such an excellent memory for birthdays, and wedding-days, and all sorts of anniversaries. Now, I should never recollect your age, if I did not remember that you are just one year younger than myself. By the way, Catherine, I think a wife ought to be *several* years younger than her husband."

" It is too late to think of that !" returned Catherine, good-humouredly. " I am sorry I cannot put back the dial of time on your account. I can only promise to keep myself as young as I can ; but at forty-four one feels oneself growing rather elderly. If ever you marry again, you must make youth a *sine quâ non*."

" I think I may promise you that you will never have a successor. If I were unmarried now, my business would be my mistress. I should desire no other bride."

There was something in this speech which jarred most unpleasantly on Catherine's sensibilities. She had long had a suspicion that Robert regarded her and their child as mere encumbrances—weights that could not be thrown aside, and that impeded his progress in the race for wealth which he had set himself to win. She felt sure of it now ; she was quite certain that his affection for herself was dead. As for Anne, he had never cared very much for her. He had never shown a father's pride in her ; he had bestowed upon her little tenderness ; she might have been his ward, Catherine thought, rather than his own and only child. He had never quite forgiven her for being a girl ; he had so desired a son, so entirely expected a boy, that Anne's birth was a very bitter disappointment, and from the first hour of her existence he had—or so his wife imagined—neglected her, and visited upon her innocent head the chagrin which he experienced when her sex was announced to him. He had been consoled at first with prophecies of " a fine boy next time !" But that next time never came, and as the years went on he began to despair of the son he so ardently wished to welcome. No other child was born to him ; Anne was

the only one who had ever called him father. He could only from time to time foster his regret, and resolve to make the best of a bad bargain.

But Catherine was in error when she supposed that Robert loved her no longer. He loved her more than he himself believed; but his passion for "getting on" had absorbed all other passions; it had deadened his sensibilities, it had engrossed his heart and mind, it had rendered him indifferent to all the little sweetneses of domestic life. Both as husband and father, he wilfully missed so much that might have made him divinely happy. His religion was fast becoming a mere matter of form; and the more formal it became the more tenaciously he clung to its outward and visible profession. There had been a time when he really desired to live to God, and to do Christian work in the world; but as no man can serve two masters, he soon found that Mammon had more and more of his time and energies, and God less and less. The good seed which had sprung up and given such fair promise gradually withered away, and thorns and thistles flourished in its stead. He was staunch to the dry bones of his creed; but his was a dead faith, which never clothed itself in the living works, without which it was a mere phantom of belief. In a word, Robert Wreford had left his first love in more ways than one; he was worldly-wise, but of the wisdom that cometh from above he was terribly deficient. And the worst of it was that he did not recognise his deficiencies; he did not even know what he lacked; he never missed the treasure which he had let slip from his careless keeping. Like the Laodiceans of old, Robert Wreford knew not that he was "wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." He lacked nothing, in his own estimation, save more capital, and a larger, keener capacity for business; and all that while his soul was starving on the husks that the swine did eat, while in his father's house on which he had deliberately turned his back there was the royal cheer he undervalued.

And yet he stood well with the religious community to which he belonged. Because he disapproved of "worldly pleasures," and because he looked and spoke sedately, and now and then used the Shibboleths of his people, he was

accounted an exemplary and consistent member of the Church, and pastor and deacons alike were disappointed when he absolutely refused to accept office of any kind, and even declined to hold the plate on collection Sundays. To his last remark Catherine made no rejoinder. What could a wife say to a husband who all but deplored the fact of his matrimonial obligations? Though she had schooled herself, as she imagined, to accept the inevitable with indifference, if not with calm content, many bitter feelings were stirring at her heart. Robert thought she was simply cold and dull; the truth being that she could not trust herself to speak.

"Well," he said presently; "I think you might evince a little more interest in what must needs concern yourself so closely! I bring you the most important news, and you receive it as coolly as if it were one of last year's empty rumours! Have you nothing to say?"

"I have said several things," she replied, quietly. "I have said that I wish Anne to have additional advantages."

"Anne! Anne! it is always Anne! I believe you would not care if the whole world were drowned, provided you and Anne escaped together. You might think a little more of your husband, of his affairs, of your own position, and a little less of your daughter—"

"Who is your daughter, also," interrupted Catherine, gravely. "If I give the child too much, you give her far too little; if you do not take care, Anne will grow up with very little affection for her father."

"The best evidence of affection is duty; that, I trust, will never be lacking in my daughter. I have thought a good deal of Anne's future lately, though you do not give me credit for much paternal consideration."

"We did think once of educating her for a governess. But that, I suppose, is unnecessary now. As we have only one child, and she a girl, we may surely manage to provide for her, and keep her at home till she marries."

"I do not see why one measure should be meted out to a girl and another to a boy. In fact—I may as well speak plainly, I have pretty well made up my mind—I mean to educate Anne as if she were of the opposite sex.

She is clever, you tell me, and I quite believe that she has talents which would amply repay the right sort of cultivation. I see for myself that she is shrewd, clear-headed, and far-seeing beyond her years. What is there to hinder me from making a boy of her?"

"Everything! Boy and girl are essentially different. It would never succeed; it would bring regret to all concerned; you would run counter to the laws of Nature if you tried to educate Anne as if she were a boy. She will make a good and noble woman—a far better and grander woman than her poor mother!—that is, of course, if she receive the proper training; but your plan would result in the development of an unfeminine woman—a disagreeable, unsatisfactory, masculine she-creature! And what would be gained?"

"Much. I should have a helper and successor in the business. My daughter would fill the place of the son I wanted. Of course, the girl must grow into the woman, as the boy must grow into the man; but there is no reason why the girl should not become a clever woman of business, and so take the position which falls naturally to a son."

"It will never do!" persisted Catherine. "Anne, notwithstanding her high spirit, is thoroughly feminine; it would be strange if she were not, brought up so entirely by myself, and under my own eye. It won't do, Robert, indeed it won't. Listen to me, for once, and give up any idea of the kind. Anne will be a good daughter to you, I doubt not; whether she will be a loving one, depends upon yourself, for love engenders love, as you must acknowledge, in spite of all your stern philosophy and scorn of 'sentiment,' as you term the expression of any kind of feeling. But she will never, in the sense you mean, stand to you in the place of a son. It was God's will that we should have but one child, and that one a girl; and we may be quite sure that all was ordered for the best."

"Catherine, if you talk all night you will not prevail upon me to change my mind. I have weighed the matter well. I perceive its extreme desirability. It is not a sudden thought, either; I have long pondered it silently, and now I am perfectly convinced of the wisdom and

expediency of my plan, and I mean to carry it out; and I call upon you to second, and in no wise to oppose, my endeavours to this end."

"The end being, taking your daughter into the business, just as if she had been your son?"

"Precisely! And when Anne comes to understand what is proposed, I do not think she will object. I must desire that you do not prejudice her against the course to be pursued."

"What course will be pursued? You cannot send her to a school for boys."

"No, I cannot; but I wish boys and girls could be taught together, as they are in America. She must, of course, leave Miss Rose's namby-pamby establishment."

"I do not think you will find a better girls' school in this neighbourhood."

"Perhaps not; but I intend Anne to leave home before she is half a year older. She shall go to a thoroughly good boarding-school—to a French school, probably. So long as I regarded her as a mere girl, I did not care about her learning any language but her own; but if she is to fill the post I desire for her, it is most desirable that she should be able to speak and write fluently both French and German. And, of course, she must be a good arithmetician, and she ought to know something of the history of commerce and of political economy. Why, Catherine! what is the matter with you?"

For the second time Robert Wreford was amazed at his meek wife's indignation. She was deadly pale, and there was a strange glitter in her eyes. Was it temper, or was it anguish, that made her tremble from head to foot, and thrilled her whole frame, as she answered, "Take my child from me! Take my life rather, Robert; for I cannot, will not, live without my child."

"Catherine, are you *mad*? A stranger would suppose you had been brought up on the stage rather than in a dressmaker's work-room. Pray compose yourself, and try to regain your common-sense. I could not have believed you would be so selfish. How many mothers before you—ay, and most loving mothers, too—have sacrificed their own inclinations to their children's good!"

"If I could but think it would be for her good!" faltered Catherine, striving to repress the passion of emotion that filled all her soul. She had never contemplated this—that her one darling child should be taken from her! She felt as if she must almost hate Robert if he persisted in his scheme.

"I think you had better go to bed," he returned, in a tone of grave rebuke. "Perhaps you may be able to hear reason to-morrow morning. You have quite convinced me now that my plan is a good and wise one. At any rate, a weak, hysterical mother is not qualified to bring up either son or daughter. Good-night, I shall hope to find you comfortably asleep. I have several letters to write before my day's work is completed."

CHAPTER VII.

WHEREIN ANNE RESOLVES TO BE AN OLD MAID.

CATHERINE went to her room in a very tempest of emotion, all the more tumultuous because she had, while in her husband's presence, striven to repress it. She broke away from him at last in something which he, at least, interpreted as passionate anger. Nor was he far wrong; but with the anger was mingled a passionate grief, which he never even suspected, and could scarcely have comprehended if he had. The mother's first impulse was to fly at once to her child's bedside and clasp her in her arms, and vow to herself that no persuasion, no threats, no anything, save absolute force, should ever induce her to consent to so unnatural a separation. Like many another patient, quiet, long-suffering, self-controlled woman, Catherine—once freed from the restraint so long imposed, once driven, as it were, to open revolt—was capable of demonstrations of feeling such as rarely surprise persons of less guarded

and more variable temperament. On such occasions she was not like the rain-swollen brook, or torrent, that overflows its boundaries, but like the pent-up reservoir, breaking suddenly from its firm enclosures, and carrying all before it on its mighty, irresistible flood of desolating waters. She wept bitterly when she found herself alone; she trembled from head to foot; she felt as if she must do something desperate, or die. As I said, her first idea was to go to Anne and tell her of her father's cruel project; but it was resigned, even before it was seriously entertained; for common-sense and motherly solicitude both spoke together, and forbade the useless disturbance of the child, wrapped, as she doubtless was, in youth's sweet, refreshing slumber.

No; Anne must not be disturbed; there was no reason why she should suffer one unnecessary pang. But Robert!—Catherine was mightily tempted to run downstairs again while the fire still burned within her, and "have it out with him," at once and for ever! She did not lack the courage just then, only something—the long-established habit of wifely honour and obedience probably—maintained its accustomed sway, and saved Mr. Wreford the shock he would have experienced had his better half yielded to her rash impulse, and appeared before him, as he scribbled away below, in the character of an outraged wife or a despairing mother—a Cassandra, a Nemesis, a Pythoness of the nineteenth century! But she sat at the side of the bed, regardless of the flight of time, by turns raging against Robert, weeping, and bemoaning herself, till the clock in the hall—as clocks will strike sixty minutes after midnight, whether you stay awake to listen to them or not—struck the first hour of another day, and she started to think how late it was, and to wonder, in quite a natural, matter-of-fact way, what had become of Robert, who generally preached *ad nau-seam* from the ancient text, "Early to bed and early to rise," &c., &c. This simple return to her accustomed train of thought proved a wonderful restorative. That is to say, she awoke to a sense of present exigencies; she lost the wild desire to rush down and quarrel with her husband, and even hoped he would not come upstairs

before she had time to regain some measure of composure. The Xantippe mood died away as rapidly as it had sprung up, and though she did not feel in the least like Griselda, she was calm enough to undress, hoping to be in bed, and apparently asleep, when Robert should make his appearance.

He came at length, and she buried her head in the pillow, and made no sign even when he came to her side of the room to turn up the gas. He glanced towards her for a moment; then said to himself, complacently, "Fast asleep! better than I ventured to expect! So like a woman, brewing such a tempest in a teapot, all in a moment, and subsiding quite as suddenly. Some men are so foolish; they soothe and caress, instead of coldly frowning down that ridiculous excitement which is half temper and half hysteria. Catherine is a good wife on the whole, though; she gives me very little trouble, all things considered. It is a rare event indeed when she flames up like she did to-night. Yes, she is a good wife, certainly—better than most, I doubt not; and as she is only a woman, and fond of me, I must not be too hard upon her. As a rule, she is contented, submissive, and thoughtful; and though she is, I am pretty sure, really attached to me, she never now makes any of those foolish, sentimental demonstrations which are such a bore to an unromantic, prosaic man of my time of life."

So Robert mused during the few minutes in which he was winding up his watch, and hastily doffing his garments of the day. He was as expeditious in undressing and tumbling into bed as his sex usually are, and Catherine, lying as still as a mouse, hoped that all was safe, and that in three minutes he would be by her side, sound asleep and haply snoring. She was disappointed, however. Once more he came towards the dressing-table to lower the gas to the faintest glimmer, and saw, lying on the floor, his wife's pocket-handkerchief, for which even then, after her long and violent weeping, she was sorely distressed. To see a thing out of its proper place invariably annoyed Mr. Wreford; accordingly he picked it up, intending to tuck it quietly under Catherine's pillow. To his great surprise he found it wet, or rather *soaked!*

drenched with the tears its owner had so copiously shed. He held it a moment in his hand, then dropped it in disgust, whether of its flabbiness or of the testimony it bore, it would be difficult to say. Then he went up close to the bedside.

“Catherine!” he said, sternly, “you are not asleep! Why do you carry on this child’s play? You have been crying like a baby! Now, don’t tell me you have not.”

“I should not think of telling you an untruth; but I would rather not talk at all. I was trying to go to sleep when you came up; my head aches terribly.”

“I wonder how many sorts of headache women have?”

“Many sorts; but the worst are those that come of heartache. Let me be quiet, Robert; it will be better for both of us. If you worry me now I will not answer for myself.”

“You will not answer for yourself! What nonsense you are talking! Are you gone daft?”

“Yes, for the moment! that is to say, I am not disposed to bear any more unkindness; I *cannot* bear it, and I am not myself. You have struck a blow that I shall feel for many a day.”

“*More* unkindness! ‘struck a blow!’” he repeated, in unfeigned astonishment. “Really, Catherine, you perplex me! Had I taken you off the stage; had you ever been a high-flown, gushing, romantic miss, I could have understood it; but *you!* an old married woman, a *Christian* woman, too; a sensible, prudent, rational-minded British matron, and *my wife!*—*all these years!* It is incomprehensible.”

“Very well; let it remain so. Only, if you have any mercy, say no more to-night. The subject must be revived, of course, but let me have time to gain composure and courage. If you do not wish me to speak to you as I have never spoken to you before—as I ought not to speak—as I shall repent afterwards of having spoken, leave me to myself.”

And Robert began to think that he had better leave her to herself. He had never seen her in such a mood, and, truth to tell, he was uncertain how he ought to treat it. He felt as a man might feel whose long-tried, faithful

hound suddenly turns upon him with tooth and claw, because he chides him. He came, however, to the wise conclusion that in such a case silence was golden. He did not wish to hear his wife say the kind of things she threatened; he did not wish to say rash things himself; and, feeling very tired, with a busy morrow of work before him, he did wish to secure a good night's rest.

"Very well!" he answered quietly, "you shall have your will. You shall sleep upon it, and perhaps in the morning you may be wiser, and disposed to do your duty. I will say no more. But if you cry again you will disturb me; one of us had better go to the spare room."

"The spare room bed is not made up, or I should have gone there at once. You need not fear, I shall not in any way disturb you."

"I am glad to hear you speak reasonably; let me give you a little water, and I should think you would like a dry handkerchief—this soaked rag is worse than useless." And in the gravest and most matter-of-fact way possible, Robert went to the wash-stand, filled a tumbler with water, and brought it to the bedside, and afterwards opened a drawer, selected a pocket-handkerchief, and presented it to Catherine.

"Now go to sleep and be a good girl," he said almost soothingly, as Catherine, after drinking the water, and indulging in the luxury of a clean, dry handkerchief, settled down again upon her pillow.

Robert was for a moment inclined to give her a kiss of peace—a kiss of forgiveness rather, such as one gives a naughty child, who has worn itself out in its unreasonable passion. He did not, however, and it was well that he refrained; if he had yielded to the brief half-impulse, Catherine, for the first time since the day of their betrothal, would have refused her lips. She could not make it up with him as if there had been a mere dispute about a trifle—as if there were nothing particular at stake. In five minutes Robert was sound asleep, but it was near dawn before Catherine lost herself in happy unconsciousness. When they rose at their usual hour, Robert was rather shocked at his wife's appearance;—not only was she deadly pale, and looking altogether extinguished, but

her features were swollen to disfigurement, her eyelids were purple and rigid, and round her eyes were dark, livid circles, that gave her the appearance of being many years older than she was. Yes, she had had "a blow," and no mistake. Robert could not help feeling a little sorry for her; he could never have conceived of a person ageing so in a single night, and as she combed out her long, silky, brown hair, he almost feared to see it plentifully streaked with silver!

Suddenly he said, "You are not fit to get up, Catherine; I know you have a splitting headache."

"Yes, I have an intolerable headache. I have slept so little."

"Go back into bed, then, and have a cup of good strong tea before you dress. I will send it up."

"Thank you; now I am on my feet I do not care to lie down again; and I have a good deal to see to this morning."

"Nonsense!" he returned, sharply. "The 'good deal' must wait. You will knock-up, you know, if you go on like this. Get into bed when I tell you, and try to sleep till your tea comes."

"Very well." And Catherine obediently laid her head again on the pillow. Truth to tell, she was not sorry to yield, for not only did her head ache distractingly, but she was sick and giddy, and her hands trembled so, that she could scarcely hold the comb. As for Robert, though resolved as ever, he did feel something like compunction, but his predominant idea just then was that he did not like the servants to behold their mistress in such a woful case. Of course they would "talk," as servants always do, and discuss the politics of the parlour below-stairs, and the housemaid would tell the cook that master and mistress had been having a regular quarrel, and the cook would be sure to reply that "it was all master's fault," &c. And Robert's love of approbation was so intense that he did not relish the thought of his conduct being canvassed, even by a couple of ignorant domestics in the kitchen. He was, therefore, somewhat relieved when Catherine once more lay down, and closed her swollen eyes, and turned away from the light. He lowered the blinds and

drew the curtains before he left the room; but just as he was on the threshold she called him back.

"Well, what is it?" He spoke impatiently, for he had just discovered that it was a few minutes later than he supposed; and punctuality was one of his most vaunted and deeply-cherished virtues.

"Do not let Anne bring my tea. I would rather not see her yet. Send Jane with it."

"I will bring it myself. And I would strongly advise you to lie quietly for several hours. I shall tell them downstairs that you are poorly."

Robert went down, not in the best of humours. Anne sat by the fire, looking over the day's lessons. She had already made the tea; she frequently did so, as she was generally first in the breakfast-room. The great Bible and the Prayer-book lay on the table. Robert, unlike the generality of staunch Nonconformists, always used a printed form; he had not "the gift," he very truly said; and it was quite understood in Mare Street that Mr. Wreford was never to be called on "to engage," as he would certainly decline. He rang the bell rather loudly, and while he took his usual seat, and found the apportioned chapter, Anne said rather timidly, "Is not mother coming down to prayers?"

"No," was Robert's curt reply. And ere he could say another word the two maids entered, and took their accustomed places, and the service—"the worship" it was commonly called in that old-fashioned household—at once commenced. I am afraid no one was much the better for that morning's exercise; the master read mechanically, and was certainly glad when he came to the terminal "Amen;" the cook was wondering whether the cat would eat the buttered toast on the fender, and calculating on how she could get through her work so as to secure an evening out, provided mistress would consent; Jane vacantly wondered where the said mistress was, for Catherine was generally down before Robert, and almost always paid a visit to the kitchen before breakfast; Anne never heard a word of the prayers, for she knew instinctively that mother was poorly, and how poorly she wanted to ascertain. It was a relief to her, as well as to her

father, when "worship" was decently concluded. Then she sprang to her feet, and almost before her father had risen from his knees, exclaimed, "I'll go and see if mother wants anything."

"No; stay here, and pour out the tea," was the authoritatively pronounced answer. "Mother is not getting up just yet; she has a very bad headache."

"Then I had better carry up her cup of tea."

"I will take it up."

To this there was nothing to be said. Of course her father had the first right, Anne determined; but it was curious: it was always herself, not he, who waited upon her mother when such attendance was required. And she felt secretly jealous as she sugared the cups and began to pour out the tea—awkwardly enough, it must be confessed, for she was always awkward and nervous under her father's eye, especially if alone with him,—a state of affairs she always avoided, if she could. He soon began to scold her for not managing better, saying that it was a disgrace to a girl of her age to slop about and handle the teapot in that clumsy fashion; and she was actually emptying the pot at once! What did she think the second cup would be like? It was quite time she made herself useful, and relieved her mother of some of the household burdens!

An insinuation which filled her with silent indignation, for it was unjust to the last degree—Anne being, as a rule, singularly helpful to her mother, and exceedingly thoughtful and handy for a girl only just in her teens. But she never could do her best—it was well if it was not her worst—while her father watched her. One good, however, resulted from her bad tea-making—the cup that went up to Catherine was much stronger than it would have been under other circumstances; and while Robert was upstairs, Anne peeped into the pot and saw, to her dismay, that it really contained only a mass of leaves: if she filled it up from the kettle it would indeed be a case of "water bewitched." So she popped in another large shell-full of tea, took care that the kettle boiled, and meanwhile contented herself with a weak infusion, that was chiefly milk and water, and very largely the latter.

Her father came down again, took up the morning paper, drank his first and then his second cup, and ate his rasher in silence. Anne began to fidget; it was getting late, and she wanted to get ready for school; but first, she must see her mother. At last, finding her father still intent on his newspaper, she ventured to say, "May I go now, father? I shall be late for school."

He glanced at the timepiece, and nodded. Anne was just escaping when he said—"Don't go near your mother's room. She is not to be disturbed."

The girl stopped suddenly, as if shot. "But, father," she urged, "she is sure to want me; she always does, if she is ever so little poorly. And perhaps I ought to stay at home this morning. The man is coming about the new shelves in the store-room, I know."

"Go to school when you are told, Anne, and leave your mother alone." She said she was not to be disturbed."

"But she would not mean that I was not to go to her," returned Anne, with a persistency and steadfastness of purpose that showed her to be her father's own child. Robert, however, only called her obstinate. It never occurred to him to notice how very much his daughter's contemned "obstinacy" resembled the firmness on which he prided himself, and which he had sedulously cultivated from his youth upwards! He replied angrily, "Do not be so troublesome. Your mother expressly named you, and begged that I would not let you go to her; and you will not."

Anne's under-lip quivered, and her eyes filled with tears. "I have never, no, never once gone to school without kissing mother," she pleaded. "Oh! have I displeased her? Is she very unwell, and afraid lest I should catch something? Please do tell me."

"Anne, I am ashamed of you, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself—a great, tall girl like you crying because she must not disturb her mother; and it is only for a matter of three hours! You will be at home again before one o'clock, by which time, I hope, your mother will be pretty tolerable, for it is only a bad headache that is troubling her; and if you had a scrap of sense you would know that nothing is so good for headache as per-

fect quiet. Now go to school without another syllable, or you and I will come to words."

Anne thought they had "come to words" enough already, and, perceiving that she had no alternative, simply obeyed, and her father saw her leave the house before he started for the station. He had said to Catherine, when he carried up her tea, "Say nothing to Anne of what we were discussing last night. I do not wish her to be told till things are more definitely arranged." Catherine promised right willingly, for she would have shrunk from mentioning the subject to her child. As she grew calmer, she began to hope that the project might perhaps be abandoned—that *something* might happen, that the threatened separation might never take place—certainly not for a long while to come! Besides, motherlike, she wanted to bear all the burden of the grief herself as long as possible, unshared by Anne, who would be sure to break her heart when she heard how sentence of banishment from home and country was passed upon her. So she replied to her husband's injunction, "I shall not say a word to her, you may rest content." And Robert knew that she would not, and he left her, satisfied, and with somewhat less of compunction than he had experienced half-an-hour before.

When Anne came home from school—and she was ten minutes earlier than usual—her first inquiry was for her mother. She learned from Jane that "Missis" was down-stairs, and in the breakfast-room,—had come down about half-past eleven, to speak to the carpenter about the shelves, looked "dreadful ill," and complained of a "hawful headache!" Jane would have added her own private convictions, but Anne flung down her hat and cloak and turned to the breakfast-room.

There she found her mother, languidly darning a table-cloth, and looking, as the housemaid had said, "dreadful ill." "Oh, mother darling, what is it?" cried the girl, running up to her, and kissing the poor pale, sodden face twenty times, as if to make full amends for the kiss of which she had been mulcted earlier in the day. "Father said you had only a headache, and I *must not* come to you! But it was more than a headache, I knew, or you

would never have stayed in bed. Tell me all about it, mother dear ! ”

“ There is nothing to tell, dear child,” replied Catherine, quietly. “ I had a *very* bad headache, and nothing worse—one need have nothing worse while the visitation lasts ; and I told your father I did not wish to be disturbed, even by you. I am better now, but I must keep quiet, and I shall not be myself till I have had a good night’s rest.”

Anne looked steadily into her mother’s face while she spoke, and then answered gravely—“ Headaches don’t come of themselves, at least to those who are not subject to them ; and you do not have even a little headache often, mother. And you look—you look as if you had had the worst headache in the world for a whole month ! Mother, you have been—*crying !* ”

“ Well, Anne, and what if I have ! Don’t we all cry, sometimes ? ”

“ I don’t see why *you* should ever cry ! You ought not to have anything to cry for. I know what it is, though ; father has been unkind.”

“ Hush, Anne, I cannot let you speak so ; what passes between your father and myself is our own private affair ; no one has aught to do with it, not even you.”

“ But, mother, something *is* the matter,” pleaded Anne, disconsolately. “ I cannot bear to see you look like this ! You cannot think how swollen and how purple your eyelids are ; and your nose is ever so red and puffy, as if you had fifty influenzas.”

“ It is only because I have been crying, my dear. I ought to have been stronger ; I ought not to have given way to my feelings.”

“ But what made you cry ? What came to your feelings that you had to give way ? ”

“ I cannot tell you, my dear. Something vexed me, gave me great pain—I cannot say what now. It lies between your father and myself. Married people have always some things quite between themselves—some things which they never share with any one, not even with their most dutiful and loving children, as you will find out for

yourself some day, Anne, my love, when you, too, are a married woman."

"I shall never marry; I have settled that. People laugh at old maids, I know, but I don't care. I mean to be one. I know I should hate married life. While I am a child I must be subject to my parents, as I ought to be; and I'll obey *you*, mother dear, if I live and you live to be a hundred and ten years old. But when I am a woman I mean to live my own life, not the life of some selfish man, who thinks because he gives me his name, and pays my expenses, I am to give up all my will to him! I mean to be Anne Wreford always, till I die."

"We shall see," said Catherine, with one of her peculiar, grave, sweet smiles. "My dear, you are a child, and you talk like a child; and though I do not, I assure you, despise or contemn old maids—as unmarried women are vulgarly called; God forbid!—I should, nevertheless, be very sorry not to be a married woman, your father's wife, and your mother, my dear little Anne. I do not regret my marriage. I am very glad that I am not at this moment Catherine Halliday."

"For all that, mother, I never will be married, I am determined."

"I can only say, my dear, *we shall see!* You are talking of what you do not in the least understand."

"But, indeed, mother, I will stay with you always! People don't marry, you know, unless they fall in love, and I am too much in love with you to fall in love with anybody else."

"Ah, my child, I may not be with you always. It is only natural and right that young people as they grow up into men and women should form new and close ties for themselves; the parents pass away when they have lived their lives—the children must remain and live theirs, as God shall order them. But for the present, little Anne, you need not concern yourself about marriage. Only, it makes me smile to hear you protest against matrimony."

"That's right! I like to see you smile. Still—I think—I do think I shall be in the same mind when I am quite grown-up! And meanwhile, mother darling, I am your own home-child, am I not?"

"Yes, my love!" said the mother, kissing the girl's broad, open brow. But her heart throbbed painfully as she thought how soon all this might be changed, and Anne divorced, as it were, from home and loved companionship.

"Then you will not tell me why you cried so much?" continued Anne, returning to her subject. And Catherine answered, "No, my child; I can only say that it was something which grieved me very deeply; but do not let us talk about it: I want to forget it just now. Did you know your lessons this morning?"

"Pretty well! I knew them, I think, as far as mere repeating went, but I did not care about them, for I was thinking of you, and fancying you might be very ill. I never was so glad to hear the schoolroom clock go the half-hour after twelve in all my life before. Didn't I bundle my books into my desk, and put on my hat and cloak, post haste! I would not stay for a moment's chat, though Laura Meadows whispered that she would walk home my way, for she had a great secret she wanted ever so much to tell me. I told her I could not listen to secrets just then; indeed, all I cared for was to reach home as fast as I could, and get to you. Mother dear! it is bad for you, stooping over that fine darning; let me do it? It is not very particular, is it?"

And before Catherine could remonstrate, Anne had her thimble on, and had taken the job of mending from her mother, who let her do it because she saw it really pleased her.

After the early dinner it began to rain, and Catherine, who had eaten scarcely anything, lay down and asked Anne to read to her, and presently she said: "As it is so wet, I should like to keep you with me this afternoon; do you think Miss Rose will excuse you?"

"I am sure she will, if I take a bit of a note in the morning. Do you know, something said to me that I might stay at home this afternoon, so I brought my books, that I might not miss the regular class-lessons? We will have a real cosy afternoon, mother, won't we? I'll read you to sleep, and then I will sit on the foot-stool by you, and think thoughts, while

" 'Shadows from the fitful firelight
Dance upon the parlour wall.' "

"Thinking thoughts" was one of Anne's peculiar expressions. It meant turning over a variety of subjects in her mind, and gravely discussing them with herself; and she was very fond of this kind of dreamy exercise, especially on dusky winter afternoons, such as this one promised to be. She was as good as her word, she read her mother to sleep, while it was yet daylight; then she studied her next day's lessons till it was too dark to see, and she had promised her mother never to read by fire-light only. Afterwards she sat very still in her favourite attitude, with folded hands, looking into the hollow of the fire, and "thinking thoughts" so intently that tea-time came before she was aware; and one of the thoughts which continually recurring, mixed itself up with all the others, was this:—"What *could* mother have cried about so dreadfully? Father vexed her, of course; but, somehow, I cannot help thinking that it was about *me*—that I had to do with it! It's very odd; I feel so sure of it! I wish I knew what they talked of after I went to bed last night."

CHAPTER VIII.

SITTING UP TO SUPPER.

THE weeks slipped rapidly away, and the Christmas holidays were already close at hand. Anne announced that the breaking-up party was on the next Tuesday evening, and that she had good hopes of the second prize for "general good conduct." "And I might have had the general improvement prize too, I think, if I had not been so lazy just as term commenced. I will try hard for it next term, that I will! But I do so wish I might learn French."

Anne said this to her mother on the Sunday evening,

when, according to custom, she sat up to supper with her parents. She spoke in a low voice, not much raised above a whisper, for her father was at a distant table, apparently absorbed in the study of Cruden's "Concordance." Not so much so, however, but that he could listen to the *sotto voce* conversation going on at the other end of the room. Since that memorable night, Robert had not spoken to Catherine on the subject of Anne's future; but, though silent, he had taken measures, and his plans were pretty definitely arranged. He had made no inquiries, but he knew perfectly that his daughter was up to that moment entirely ignorant of any probable changes, and he could not help feeling a little uneasy as to the way in which she would take the news that must be imparted. Catherine had by this time, of course, grown familiar with the bugbear of separation which had so much scared her at first sight; he argued she had, doubtless, ere this, resigned herself to the inevitable; for, except when she took a sudden whim into her head, she was really a sensible woman—that is, sensible as women go, for Mr. Wreford had by no means a high opinion of the weaker sex. When he heard Anne say longingly, "I do so wish I might learn French," he hastened to reply—"Suppose I tell you you are going to learn it?"

"Oh, father, am I?—am I *really*?" she exclaimed, springing from her seat at her mother's side and going rapidly towards him. Her face was all aglow. Catherine grew pale; she divined too well what was coming.

"Yes," said Mr. Wreford, slowly; "I intend you to learn both French and German."

"And music, father? Oh! if I might have a piano and learn to play it! I do know all my notes, and they tell me I could sing nicely if my voice were cultivated."

"No, I said nothing about music; though perhaps, as a reward for *very* good behaviour, I *may* let you take a few lessons; but not just yet—in a year's time, say. At present your attention must be chiefly bestowed on the acquirement of the French language. You must learn not only to read it, but to speak it fluently."

"Mademoiselle says French can never be learned perfectly in England. Six months in Paris, I have heard her

say, is worth seven years of what is called French Conversation at home."

"Mademoiselle is quite right. I have always understood that the only way to speak French was to speak it in France. I am not going to pay away my money for any mere school-girl French—such as I dare say your fellow-pupils chatter. You must learn the language thoroughly, or it will be of no use to you."

"I will try, father. But am I not to learn at Miss Rose's?"

"No; you are going to leave Miss Rose's school. You must bid your friends there good-bye next Tuesday evening."

Anne looked, as she felt, very much astonished, but no whit dismayed. Her father watched her keenly; her mother watched her, too, in almost breathless anxiety.

"Does Miss Rose know I am leaving?" was her next question.

"She does not at present, nor is it necessary she should, since she is always paid at the commencement of the term, which does away with the old system of a quarter's notice previous to the removal of a pupil. But I shall write to Miss Rose as soon as the holidays begin. Be sure you bring away all your books and slates on Tuesday!"

"Shall I say anything to the girls?"

"Please yourself. You can tell them, if you like."

"And what shall I tell them?"

"That you are going to a school in Paris—a first-rate school in the Champs Elysées, or whatever they call the place."

Anne's colour came and went rapidly, and it was more than a minute before she could speak calmly. "Going—to—school—in Paris?" she faltered out, looking first at her father, then at her mother, as if unable to credit the testimony of her ears. "But you do not mean that I shall live in Paris, do you?"

"What else can I mean? You would not go backwards and forwards perpetually, as you do now, I suppose?"

"No! but to go quite away! It seems so strange; I really can't believe it." To her father's extreme relief, she did not burst into tears. Her mother thought it was

only because she did not realise the fact of continual absence from her home.

“ You will see a great deal,” her father resumed; “ you will travel by land and by water; you will see all that is worth seeing in Paris and elsewhere; you will have new companions; above all, you will learn to speak the language as easily as you now speak English; you will enjoy advantages such as your mother and I never dreamed of in our young days.”

“ I think I shall like it!” remarked Anne, drawing in her breath. Catherine could not have said a word to save her life; a sword seemed to pierce her heart when the child she so idolised expressed her willingness to leave her.

“ Like it! of course you will!” replied Robert, quite enchanted with his daughter. “ Your mother, I believe, thought you would make a terrible trouble of it; but I understood you better, you see! I knew you were a girl of too much sense to fret about leaving home for awhile, when so much was to be gained by your absence.”

“ I am afraid I did not think of that!” said Anne, in an altered tone. “ I forgot that I must leave mother for weeks and months together—and you too,” she added, as an after-thought, feeling that regrets which included only one parent must be, at the best, ungracious. Without exactly knowing why, she dared not turn and meet her mother’s eye, though if she had known it she might have looked with impunity, for Catherine was staring at the carpet at her feet, as if she were suddenly so much interested in the pattern that she could think of nothing else.

“ When am I to go?” echoed the girl, half eagerly, yet half dreading to hear the answer.

“ In about a month; a little less; perhaps. You will have enough to do to get ready. You will want several new dresses, I suppose; but your mother will see to that.”

“ Did mother know before to-night?”

“ Yes, I told her several weeks ago; but I wished her to say nothing to you just then. I am much pleased with you, Anne; many girls would have cried like great babies

at the thought of leaving home. I am glad to find you so sensible and strong-minded."

"I am not that," answered Anne, slowly. "I am afraid it is only that I like to see the world, and to have changes; but I shall cry enough before I go, and after I get there, I expect. I am too much surprised yet to be sure how I really feel about it."

"The more you think about it the better you will like the prospect, I am convinced. Of course you will feel leaving home and us—it would be unnatural if you did not. But knowing it is for your good, you will make the best of it; and once there, you will be entirely happy,—I have no doubt of it."

"Will there be no English people in the house?"

"I should say not; I am not sure."

"What is the lady's name?"

"Madame de la Tour. She is very highly recommended, and I hear the best reports of her establishment and of her pupils. Of course, she is a Roman Catholic, but you will attend the Protestant worship—I shall stipulate for that; and I trust you are too well grounded in the principles of Nonconformity to run any danger of perversion. Remember, Anne, what you are and how you have been brought up. I have no son; I shall never have one now, and I look to my daughter to inherit and hold my principles, my creed, my business, and such wealth as it shall please God to bestow on me. Women are said to be always weak, irrational, and frivolous; that, it strikes me, is the fault of the very imperfect education they commonly receive. At any rate, I mean to make the experiment—I mean that you shall not suffer loss because of your sex; you shall have all the advantages which I should have given to your brother, had he ever existed, and you will also grow up to all the responsibilities which would naturally have belonged to him."

"But, father, do you mean that I am to learn a business, as if I were a boy?"

"Precisely. But not merely *a* business! It is *my* business for which you are about to qualify yourself—*my* business, *and yours* when you take my place, in years to

come. There is no reason why a woman of business should not succeed as well as a man of business. The great thing is to be *thorough*. Thoroughness and earnestness are worth a lot of more dazzling qualities which are generally lumped together under the name of *genius*. Though, of course, a certain amount of talent is to be desired; nor do I think, when it comes to the point, you will be found deficient."

"But, father," urged Anne, "you forget one thing—I never could do sums; I always was stupid at arithmetic, though I do not dislike it. That is, I do not dislike it if I can see my way into it; but I cannot bear working my sums all in the dark: dividing here and multiplying there, without knowing the reason why. I always feel as if I were cheating when I get the answer without knowing *how* it comes."

"I am glad to hear it. I will take care that you have the best instruction, and when the right time comes I can help you myself, for I believe I may say, without vanity, that I am an excellent arithmetician, having always, even as a child, had a love of figures, and a strong liking, almost amounting to a passion, for the exact sciences. If I had been a Cambridge-man, I should have come out first wrangler! As it was, I had to grope my way through all sorts of difficulties and uncertainties. I had no education worthy of the name. But I was plodding and full of pluck, and determined to succeed, and I have so far succeeded, and shall, I trust, by the blessing of Providence, succeed still further. That business of ours is capable of developments in every direction—it ought to come to be, it *shall* come to be, one of the first in London—consequently in England—consequently in the world!"

"The firm of Bright and Hankins, father?"

"What was once the firm of Bright and Hankins. But, as you know, Mr. Bright is dead, and, as far as regards the business, I am his sole heir. Mr. Hankins is already taking steps to retire, and his son absolutely declines to follow his father's calling. Very shortly—by the time you are ready to come into the counting-house, Anne—it will be all mine, mine and yours, my girl!—and yours, if you choose—all yours, when I am gone. There,

Anne Wreford, you have a career before you such as not one girl in a thousand is able to secure!"

"I will try to be worthy of it, father!" said Anne, proudly. "You shall not be disappointed in me."

"There's my good, brave girl! You are your father's own daughter, Anne—not easily daunted—not prone to shrink back because there is a straw in your way."

"Nor because there is a lion in my way, either!"

"So much the better, for there will be lions in your way. You will have to give up many things which are supposed to be feminine prerogatives. You will have to make sacrifices; the prizes of life are not gained by dreaming."

"If you mean," returned Anne, "that I am to give up girl-pleasures, and having lovers, and all that, I shall not have to practise much self-denial. I told mother, only the other day, that I never meant to marry—that I would never be hampered with a man."

Robert burst out laughing. He did not often explode in this fashion; but Anne's delivery of her intentions was irresistibly ludicrous. Then he grew grave, and said, "Above all things, Anne, do not make rash vows. At twelve years old neither girl nor boy can possibly comprehend the advantages or disadvantages of marriage. We will not take either alternative into our calculations just yet. Still, I must tell you, that, as a single woman, you would be far more likely to succeed in business than as a married one. And you will not have the same inducements which the majority of girls have. Unimportant women should marry, or they are actually nowhere in the push and pull of life. Women who really and truly have a career, which they purpose to themselves to carry out, do better to avoid matrimony. And now, it is time you went to bed; I don't like your sitting up so late. School life will be good for you, inasmuch as you will be obliged to conform to set rules and fixed hours, which are indispensable to the building up of a sound and healthy organisation; and just remind yourself sometimes that *without* health you can do nothing, can pursue no calling, follow out no career; and if you injure your constitution now, you will be taking so much from the capital with

which nature has gifted you, and with which you are to trade eventually. There is a Latin proverb, *mens sana in corpore sano*, which gives you to understand that there is no earthly blessing equivalent to a sound mind in a healthy body. And now, child, go to bed, and go to sleep, if you can! Good-night!"

And Robert gave his daughter a hearty kiss, such a kiss as she did not remember having had from him in all her life before. Then she went to her mother, who had never stirred nor spoken during the whole of the conversation.

"Good-night, mother dear," she said; "you don't mind, do you? You think it is good for me to go away, and learn French and other things, don't you?"

But Catherine made no reply. Anne's ready acquiescence in the scheme had taken her altogether by surprise, and struck her dumb; she could not have spoken just then, whatever silence might seem to imply. She felt no inclination to weep; she felt literally frozen; the tears would not flow. Anne started. "Why, mother, your hands are like ice, and it is not at all a cold night. Do come nearer the fire." But Catherine neither stirred nor spoke; she sat on her chair more like a statue than a woman. "Are you angry with me, mother?" continued the child; "I will not go if you think you cannot spare me; father would never force me to it—would you, father?"

"Go to bed, Anne," was Robert's answer, spoken in his harshest tones—those tones which she had never yet ventured to disobey, much less defy. "Go to bed, and leave your mother to me."

Slowly and sadly Anne retreated, casting behind her, as she left the room, a glance of perplexity and regret. When she shut the door her mother had not moved; her father wore his gravest, most determined countenance. When Robert looked as he looked then, there was written upon every feature, upon every line of his hard, yet handsome face,—"*no appeal!*!" And Anne, as well as Catherine, knew that look, and all that it really meant.

When Anne was fairly gone Robert stirred the fire, and looked steadily at his wife, and he said to himself, "Now we are going to have another stage-scene! I am sick of

these performances. *I will not be the one to speak first.*" But that resolution was not so easily acted upon. The minutes passed, the timepiece ticked and ticked in the dead silence of the room. Presently the church clock struck eleven, and then Robert thought it was time to make a move. "Are you going to sit there all night, Catherine?" he said.

As she made no answer, he went towards her, still speaking. "Don't you hear me? Are you asleep with your eyes open? It is past eleven, far too late for Sunday night."

Then Mrs. Wreford lifted her eyes, and looked straight into Robert's, still without a word; and her eyes were those of a hunted animal, of a creature brought to bay. In spite of himself the man shivered. This was worse than the worst passion of tears and wail. Then he said, "Catherine, what is the matter with you?" And he laid his hand on hers.

His touch seemed to break the strange spell which held her, and she drew a long, quivering breath, like one who suffers bodily anguish and strives to bear it without moan.

"What is the matter with me?" she answered dreamily. "Need you ask? My pain is greater than I can bear."

"My dear Catherine," he returned kindly, "let me say a few words rationally. If Anne were doomed to the cloister, or to sudden death, you could not appear more overwhelmed. Are you the only mother in London, think you, who is asked to sacrifice herself for her child's good?"

"If I only knew it would be for her good! If I could only believe that she will not be miserable, I would not interfere, I would not complain. Sacrifice myself! You know I would sacrifice my life for Anne. I have but her."

"You have no other child, but you have your husband. I have heard that some women, many women, indeed, sink by degrees the wife in the mother, and care little, if at all, for the father of their offspring. I find now that common report is true. It is obvious that *you* care nothing for *me*."

"I care nothing for you!" replied Catherine, dreamily. "Yes, I do, Robert; and I cared very much for you once; but you killed the great, deep love I bore you in the first years of our wedded life. You killed it with coldness, indifference, and neglect. You did not want my love; you repelled it, you ignored it, you starved it, and it died. Yes! my love for you—that love which you sought, and which I gave you, five-and-twenty years ago—is *dead*!—dead as that fire will be in half-an-hour's time, for lack of fuel, and choked with its own ashes."

"Catherine, once for all, I desire to know what it is you bring against me? That romance of love being dead, and choked with its own ashes, is very pretty and poetic, I dare say; but we are not living in a three-volume novel, nor in a five-act drama. I am no hero, you are no heroine; we are just a respectable, middle-class, middle-aged couple—husband and wife; and we have a child who will soon be shooting up into a woman. Let us do the best we can for each other and for her."

"God knows that is what I have always tried, with all my heart, to do."

"In many ways, I know you have. You are an excellent manager, you are a faithful wife, you are a fond, over-fond, if not a wise mother. You have been all this, and more—God forbid that I should detract from your virtues!—but you let yourself be blinded, or, rather, you will not permit yourself to take any but the narrowest view of life. The fact is, Catherine, you are not fit to be the wife of a rising man."

"I do not think I am," she said coldly; "but, being your wife, it cannot be helped."

"No, it cannot, and therefore I wish to make the best of circumstances. We are married, and we must put up with each other's shortcomings and provocations. I see now how great a mistake early marriages, early engagements are, especially in the case of a man who has to make his own way in life, and who is determined to make it, and to attain a certain goal, spite of every difficulty."

"We were engaged early, but we waited long enough for marriage. I would have released you any day during that ten years' engagement, if only you had hinted a

desire for it. I would not have kept you against your will, or to your injury, for all the world contained. If my heart had broken, I would have let you go, had you only said one word. Oh, why did you not? Why did you not, Robert?"

"One never knows why one did or did not do things in the irrevocable past. But you scarcely understand me: you were a very suitable wife for me, when I courted and when I married you; but my views have expanded, and yours have not. I have grown up to the position I intend to occupy, and you have been standing still. I ought to have waited, and in due season married an educated woman brought up in good society. In my early days it would have been folly, presumption, to think of addressing a lady; but now—I might marry a woman born and bred in the rank to which I have risen, had I but been wise enough to remain a bachelor. You perceive my meaning. I am not finding any fault with you. I only mean that self-made men should marry late and in the station to which they attain—not in that from which they spring."

"It is too late now," said Catherine, sadly. "I wish for your sake we had never met. I have tried so hard to be your help-meet, and, after all, you tell me, you suggest to me, that I am an incumbrance, a dead weight on your hands, keeping you from a more eligible alliance."

"Now, really, how you women do exaggerate! I never intended to say you were an incumbrance."

"Nevertheless, you did say it! You imply that if you were free, you would make another and very different choice. I cannot release you; I would if I could."

"My dear, I don't wish it. You will, woman-like, twist my words. I should be content if I could awaken in your heart a little more ambition; if you would cherish a little less sentiment and a little more common sense. I don't wish to change; perhaps you do, as you find me so unsatisfactory a husband."

"You need not insult me, Robert."

"There it is, again! A married man has need of all the patience of Job, and of the philosophy of—— I don't know whom! I speak freely to my wife, and she says I

insult her ! I hold my peace, and I am taken to task for coldness and neglect. I wish to provide a splendid future for our only child, and I am taunted with heartless cruelty ! Is it not so ? Ask yourself what is the truth, and be candid, Catherine."

" I don't know what to answer, Robert ! I dare say I am to blame, for there are always two sides to a quarrel. But I am bewildered, almost stunned. Perhaps I am stupid, but I could not help feeling that you wished I were not your wife, and that, saying what you did, you insulted me. And really I cannot understand some things you have said to-night in any other light than—— ”

" In any other light than that which your bad temper casts upon them, Catherine. I do not think you guess how defective your temper is becoming. Whenever you are vexed, or disappointed, or unpleasantly surprised, you at once *give way to temper* ! Did you never hear that 'temper is everything' ? ”

" Often and often," she replied, fairly nettled at last. " I wish you would take it to heart. Why, at this moment you are in a temper. I see it in your eyes ; I hear it in your tone."

" You were never more mistaken in your life. I am perfectly calm."

" There are such things as calm tempers, and they are the worst of all. It is possible to be ' perfectly calm,' and yet intensely bitter ; to be tranquil and collected, and yet violate every principle of Christian charity. But I was wrong to recriminate ; recrimination never yet helped two people to a better understanding of each other."

" Exactly so. Still I must reply that I *never give way* to my temper. I feel it rise, I grant you ; but I keep it under control."

" And all the while say the hardest things."

" I deal faithfully with you, with all whom I believe to be in fault. Catherine, seriously, as a Christian woman, you ought to curb this irritability, this impatience of contradiction, which leads you so often to forget yourself. And it is a very bad example for Anne."

" Don't say any more about Anne ; you have won her

over to your side. She is as ready to go as you are to send her. I have lost my child doubly, now."

"When it comes to talking about taking sides, I think it is time the conversation came to a close. I am delighted to find Anne so sensible; and now is your time to prove that your affection for her really is unselfish. It is decided that she goes, and she, like a good, dutiful child, cheerfully agrees. Do not perplex her, do not pain her by letting her see that while she obeys the wishes of one parent, she is acting against the judgment of the other. And now, if you please, we will go to bed, for I am tired of useless talk, and want my sleep. These late hours and this exciting sort of discourse do not suit me at all. Go on! I will put out the gas."

Catherine went slowly upstairs, thinking of the familiar lines—

"Oh, wad some power the giftie gie us,
To see ousels as ither see us."

CHAPTER IX.

MAKING THE BEST OF IT.

"MOTHER," said Anne the next evening, "are you vexed with me?"

"No, my dear. Why should I be vexed with *you*?"

"Then why are you so dull and quiet? Do you know, you never said a word while we were having tea, and you have scarcely spoken since, except just a short reply to what I asked. Oh, mother, I am sure you are not pleased with me! If you really wish me not to go away from home, I will not. I will tell father flatly that I will not leave you of my own free will."

"It is too late now, Anne. Indeed, it has been too late all along. Opposition on your part would have been

fruitless, for you know what your father is when he has once made up his mind. And since you must go, it is quite as well that you do not dislike the prospect. I confess, my dear, I was disappointed at first when you seemed so ready to embrace your father's scheme. I thought you had more home-clinging in your nature; but I see now that I was selfish. I ought rather to rejoice that you will escape the suffering I dreaded so much for you. I am trying to be glad, dear, that you and your father are of one mind in this particular."

"Mother, it is I who am selfish," cried Anne, vehemently. "I am a wretched, horrid creature not to care more for leaving you, though I *do* care, only not half enough. No! don't stop me. I will tell you all my heart, and perhaps when you know what a mean, ungrateful thing I am, you won't grieve so much to lose me. Mother dear, I feel at this moment, and I have felt ever since last night, as if I were two people—as if I were Anne Wreford and somebody else besides. Anne Wreford feels like crying when she thinks of leaving Ivyside and saying good-bye. Somebody else says, 'I shall see Paris; I shall cross the sea; I shall learn heaps of things; the girls at Miss Rose's will all envy me! I shall come home a person of consequence! And—yes, I'll say it out!—I shall have nice new dresses, and perhaps a velvet bonnet and a muff!' There! is not that some one else a good-for-nothing, vain, hollow-hearted girl?"

"No, my love; it is only natural that you, at your age and with your stirring disposition, should look forward with pleasure to so great a change. Anne dear, let us have it out, and then we will say no more about it. I will be as sincere as my daughter—I will confess that last night I *did* feel deeply wounded, when you evinced so much pleasure at the prospect of what had already cost me days of sorrow and nights of broken sleep."

"It was downright horrid of me!"

"Hush, dear! I do not wish to be interrupted. I did feel pained, I say; I felt, I think, like the dumb creatures must feel when their young ones are taken from them, and there is no appeal. For, Anne, you do not and

cannot know how passionately I have loved you ; nay, I did not know myself, till your father said he had quite determined on sending you away. When you were born your father was so disappointed at your being what he called 'the wrong sort,' that he scarcely cared to look at you ! Somehow, it seemed to me as if I must make amends for the love he did not give—I must give you double love and double tenderness. I had hoped for a boy, because I knew your father had set his heart upon having a son for his firstborn ; but when you—a little, soft, helpless, baby, my first baby, too—lay on my arm, I felt that I would not change you for any boy ; my own girl was worth more to me than all the boy-babies in the world ! And when I held you to my breast and laid my fingers on your little velvet cheeks, I forgot that I had ever *wished* to be the mother of a son, and I cried for pure overflowing happiness. As time passed on, and the boy your father hoped for never came,—for, as you know, it has pleased God that you should be our only child,—as you grew older, you became more and more to me ; you seemed to be *all* mine, for your father did not interest himself very much about you, and as he was so much from home—unavoidably so, in his business—you and I were always together. You were my chief happiness, and I, for many years, was yours ; and it never occurred to me that we could be separated in any other way than that in which people who love each other, ever so dearly, are sometimes separated—by death, I mean. I thought I should keep you, as mothers generally do keep their daughters, till I gave you into the loving charge of some one who would be more to you than even I had been, or could be. When you were little we intended to educate you for a governess, that you might always have a living in your hands ; but I thought you could learn all that was necessary at a day-school, and when you began to teach you could take morning pupils, as Mrs. Anderson's governess does, and so have your own home always. Then, as we grew more prosperous, and it seemed likely that there would be no need for you to earn money, I thought how much better it would be for *you* ! As our income increased I rejoiced, because it was so much nicer for you

to grow up amid the surroundings warranted by easy circumstances; I said to myself, 'Now, Anne can have this or that advantage; now, she will be able to take a far different position than was mine in my young days; now, if we are careful, we can lay by a nice little fortune for her, so that she may be provided for always. If she should marry, she need not go empty-handed to her husband; if she should not, all the better for me; I shall have her with me when I am old, and she will have an income and a standing of her own when her father and I am gone.' In short, my dear, I am afraid I loved you rather unreasonably, rather *selfishly*. I had arranged a certain programme in which you and I were to perform one never-ending duet together; then, suddenly, I found that you were to study a part in which I could have no share; we might no longer go hand-in-hand along the paths of life; a career was provided for you—a career against which my judgment, as well as my heart, protested; and—and—can you wonder, Anne, that I was stunned by the shock? that I *could not* bring myself to give you up as soon as the sacrifice was demanded? that I could not, with composure, watch the fading away of the hopes that had grown to be a part of myself? Can you understand me, dear? or am I talking in a strain incomprehensible?"

"I think I understand you, mother. I am sure I do, though I dare say I don't enter into it as I should if I were older; besides, I have often been told that a girl never knows how much her mother has loved her till she is herself a mother. Still, I do see why it came upon you with such a shock, and why it vexed you so when I made no objection to father's plans. Mother, I can't bear for you to be grieved; let me tell father, when he comes home presently, that I *cannot* leave you—that I would rather stay at home with you, and with him, of course, than to go to Paris to learn to talk French ever so well. Besides, I do not see why I cannot at least *begin* to learn it at Miss Rose's. Mademoiselle would teach me properly, no doubt; it would not hurt me to learn a little grammar and some 'Dialogues,' before I went to France. Could it not be so, mother dear?"

"No, my love. I did propose it; but your father is set upon your going at once to the 'fountain-head' of the language, as he puts it. Besides, he thinks you will get your ideas widened more completely by going abroad; and as you are to go, he says, the sooner the change is made the better; the sooner you will get accustomed to the new way of life, and, in consequence, be able the sooner to profit by it. There is reason in what he says, as there always is. Your father is a clever man, and ambitious, and you are like him, Anne. I am neither clever nor ambitious; and there is no greater mistake in life than for a mother to try to force her child into her own ruts, whether they suit her or whether they do not."

"If you are not clever, you are wise, mother; and if you are not ambitious, you are good and loving. Oh, dear! I wish this scheme had never been started. I wish I could go back to last night at supper-time, when I knew nothing—when I was only happy Anne Wreford, without her other self!"

"As that cannot be, my dear, it is of no use to wish it. And I am glad your father told you, for I should never have had the courage."

"Now, mother, it comes to this: am I to make up my mind to go, or am I not?"

"I think your mind is made up already, and I am glad; for you *must* go, Anne. You have no choice, my dear; your father wills it, and you must obey him. I dare say it is for the best; I am sure it is, or it would not be. I believe that God orders all these events, and means them for our real happiness; and if the present does not please us, we must remember that He sees and knows what we do not, and that He sends the trial, whatever it may be, for good and wise purposes. I shall try to think, dear, that God has you in His hands, and that His great love and care are about you always, and that He is fitting you, in His own way, for the unseen future which lies before you. So do not fret about me, my child. Of course, the parting will be hard, but I can bear it, and if it does you good—*real* good—I shall be amply repaid. And, of course, you will write to me,

and tell me all your school-life, and what kind of place Paris is, and whether you like it as well, or better, than London. And, then, there will be the looking forward to your coming home."

"I have heard Mademoiselle say the holidays in France are quite different from ours. They have scarcely any Christmas recess, she says; the longest holidays are in the autumn."

"Never mind when they are. You will know all about them when you are at school, and then you can tell me, that I may begin at once to look forward to your return. And now, my dear, let us think of the bright side, and make the best of the time we have together. Go and fetch your dress for to-morrow evening. I want to see whether the sash is in the right place; and did you not tell me you wanted a new pair of dancing shoes?"

"Those I have will do for the party. And, of course, I must have new ones to take with me. I shall want a great many new things, shall I not, mother?"

"Yes, indeed you will. We must make a list, and begin our shopping very speedily," said Catherine, cheerfully.

Anne tripped out of the room, very much relieved to find that her mother did not mean "to make a fuss about it!" But as soon as the child had gone, Catherine laid down her work, covered her eyes with her hands, and groaned aloud. "What will my life be worth?" she moaned—"what will my life be worth when she is gone? And she does not know it, my darling! but we shall never, *never* be all to each other that we have been ever since I had her! We shall never be quite the same again; the old, happy days will never come back again. Oh, my little Anne, that I thought was all my own! Oh, my God! what a selfish creature I am! But I will not—no, I will not let her see that I grieve; I will not cloud her sunshine. Oh, my God, give me the strength to bear up while she is here; give me the strength I need for all that lies before me; and oh, soften my heart towards Robert, for I cannot quite forgive him yet—and he is my own husband, and I loved him so dearly *once*. Ah me, how wretched I am!"

Little guessed Robert of the deep waters in which Catherine's soul was plunged. He was bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh, but he knew little more of her inner life than that of any other woman with whom he was tolerably well acquainted. It has been written by one who has studied carefully our domestic relations—"and in the long years liker shall they grow;" that is, if they—the husband and wife—bound in indissoluble ties, grow not more *unlike*! Married people either become more at one in heart and soul and thought, as time passes on, or else they drift and drift apart, till at last there is little in common between them save the mere habitudes which are inseparable from their mutual position. As another writer has observed—"There is no half-way house in wedded life; and no aching solitude like that of an ill-matched pair, so close, and yet so far away; eternally bound together, and yet for ever divided."

Robert was no more the Robert of her youth. Did all middle-aged business men change thus? she often asked herself. Were they *all* cold, severe, unsympathising, and pre-occupied? Had all wives to learn the bitter lesson which she was so slow, so reluctant to get by heart? But all this had been gone over long ago, and she had schooled herself to a staid reserve, and to something which certainly was not happiness, but which was very near akin to it—*contentment*. She had grown used to living her own life—that is, her own inner life; she had become reconciled, as she believed, to a lot which was so far different from that which she had pictured to herself when she promised to be Robert's wife, though sometimes a yearning that was almost pain awoke for one of the old affectionate smiles, one of the tender looks or speeches that had been hers in the dear old time when both were young and poor. I really believe that she would have liked to return to the days when she had to work hard and to make every shilling go as far as possible. I am sure she would have liked it had the old privations and the old economies brought back the dear old Robert, to whom she had plighted her warm girlish affections. And yet! what had she to urge against the well-to-do, highly respectable, and respected Mr. Wreford of to-day? If

it had been possible, which of course it was not, to refer the various points of their disagreement to any judicious arbiter, Catherine felt that it would really be extremely difficult to make out any clear statement of her wrongs. Her wrongs! Had she actually any? She did pretty much as she liked at home. Robert seldom interfered with her arrangements, and up to the present time he had left Anne entirely to her management; he was steady "as old Time," he had raised her to a position far above that enjoyed by any of her former friends and companions; he had surrounded her with comforts, even with luxuries, comparatively speaking; and he had promised her still better things to come. He had done his utmost to provide for her even from the first; he had effected a small insurance on his life when it had been a hard struggle to spare the yearly premium, and as his means increased he had from time to time increased the amount of the policy. She had been assured that if she were left a widow at any time she would not be cast, with her child, penniless on the world, as befalls so many women of the middle class. Then, she could scarcely say that Robert neglected her! It was very late, sometimes, before he came home in the evening; but then, he had been detained in Fenchurch Street; he had been working hard, not seeking pleasures in which she had no share, as so many husbands did! He liked her to be well, though plainly, dressed; and for the last three or four years he had begun to bring her home presents. Nothing of any great account, such presents as a woman of the world might have disdained—a pair of best kid gloves, a silk umbrella, half-a-dozen cambric handkerchiefs in a pretty box, an embroidered apron, and *once* a handsome silk dress, the cost of which she never knew, only it came from *Hilditch's*, to whose emporium all City gentlemen seem instinctively to resort, and who do not, as a rule, deal in inferior articles.

And yet there were moments when Catherine per-
versely hated the sight of that dress, and looked
regretfully on its rich sheeny folds of softest grey—
Robert's favourite colour. It seemed to her that he gave
her things in order to make up for that which she no

longer received. When she fell into a morbid train of thought, she told herself that he brought these gifts to her as a *duty*, not as an expression of his love and continual thought for her. Truly, Catherine was getting into an unhealthy state of mind; and now and then she felt it, and took herself to task, and resolved to be more reasonable, and to content herself with that outside Darby and Joan show of affection which exemplifies itself in walking to church together arm-in-arm, or at least side by side; in a regularly-paid allowance for personal and household expenses; and in such general appearances in public as are expedient. For that he gave her all he had to give, that no one else had the hundredth part or fraction of anything she missed; she was perfectly convinced; but that the "all" should be so limited, so pitifully circumscribed, so unsatisfactory—ah! there was the sting of it.

For many months she had gone on very calmly. Robert and she had less and less to say to each other beyond the common daily topics which must needs be discussed between them; but Anne was growing out of childhood—she was becoming more and more of a companion; and already Catherine was looking forward to that happy time when, besides the love of mother and daughter, there should be that sisterly tie, that deep, perfect friendship which is the sweetest charm of the intercourse between a tender mother and her grown-up daughter, whose perfect trust and confidence are only rivalled by her filial reverence; who hides and can hide nothing from her, who is indeed a second and wiser and more experienced self. "Dear heart! she will soon be a woman. The years slip away so fast," Catherine would say to herself, as she noted how tall Anne was growing, and how she gave up her childish play, and seemed to find her greatest delight in little household matters, in sensible conversation, or in walking or reading with her mother. And Catherine wove many a pleasant vision of the days to come, when she and Anne would be *friends*, as well as mother and child together; when she could ask Anne's advice; when they could talk over so many subjects on which she had her own unexpressed

opinions ; when they could read grave books, and perhaps go to the seaside together.

That had been the climax of the ambition of both lately, for, strange to say, Anne had never seen the sea, and Catherine had only been once to Broadstairs and once to Sheerness in the days that seemed now so "long, long ago." And at Sheerness she had naturally seen more mud than sea.

And now all these sweet dreams had melted away into one stern, cruel reality ; mother and child were to be forthwith separated—and, if all Robert's schemes and provisions were fully carried out, separated for all time ; or so it seemed to Catherine, who could not but perceive that Anne more resembled her father than herself in character, and argued thence that she would pursue the career set before her with an ardour and a persistency that would leave little space for the cultivation of those gentle domestic affections and simple pleasures which she had so fondly anticipated.

That night, later, when Anne had gone to bed, and Catherine was still busy with the lace-tucker that was to finish off the dress for the breaking-up party, Robert, who had been reading his newspaper silently for a good while, suddenly threw down the sheet, and asked abruptly, "Have you and Anne had any talk ?"

"Yes. We had a long, quiet talk before you came in."

"Well ?"

"It was settled that we should make the best of it. Anne is quite content to go. How she will feel it when she finds herself alone at school is another matter. She sees the prospect now through rose-tinted glasses."

"And I desire you will say nothing to damp her spirits. Don't be putting notions into her head ; she is not romantic, *as you are !* Anne is *my* child, and she will grow up, happily, innocent of sentiment and rubbish, if you leave her alone. It is quite time she left you before she becomes imbued with *your* unfortunate passion for constituting *yourself* a heroine."

Catherine felt cut to the heart. Was Robert bent upon proving how cruel a man *can* be to his wife, all the while he imagines he is treating her with exemplary kindness ?

Did he wish to kill the remnants of the love she still cherished for him? Would he continue these unmerited taunts, these savage thrusts, till chilled affection became indifference, and indifference grew into sheer aversion? But if she had uttered only one of these interrogations he would again have reproved her for her stagey affections and her foolish love of sentiment. It was of no use to speak—indeed, she scarcely dared trust herself to speak; and yet, if she kept silence he would probably accuse her of apathy, or of sullenness! Few men like their objurgations to be received without a word, any more than they care to be sharply answered back again. And there are few women who know how to preserve the golden medium, to answer with discretion, meekly, yet not servilely; sensibly, but not severely; calmly, but not coldly, without acrimony and without cringing.

But Catherine did know, and it was well for both she did—that in steering clear of the rocks of Scylla she could so direct her bark as to avoid the dangerous whirlpool of Charybdis. She answered quietly, with firmness and yet without temper, “ You need not be afraid, Robert; I am not likely to make things harder for our dear child. She will never know what it costs me to let her go without a murmur. She will never even guess how hard is the task I have set myself.”

“ And that task is——?”

“ To say and do nothing that can make her restless and unhappy either now or presently, when she is far away among strangers. To interest her continually—and myself, as far as I can—in preparations for her journey, to soothe her if she gets fearful and doubtful; to inspirit her if she becomes down-hearted; to put myself with all my hopes and fears quite out of the question, and to study only my child’s welfare and happiness.”

“ Mine, then, are of no account, I suppose? You devote yourself to Anne as if you were her sole parent. Do you think it costs nothing to separate myself from my only child?”

Catherine did not answer. What answer could she give to a man so perversely unkind, so determined not to be satisfied with her behaviour? Seeing, however, that he

waited for her reply, she said presently, "Let us think now of Anne, and of no one else; there will be plenty of time for our differences when she is gone. Blame me then as much as you will; but I tell you, Robert, that if you are sharp and unkind to me *now*, you may lay upon me more than I can bear. Whether I am foolish, sentimental, stagey, or not, have pity on me, just as you would have on a person who suffered cruel, bodily torture, and spoke wildly and impatiently in his pain."

"Sharp and unkind! *Catherine*—"

"*Please*, Robert, leave me alone. It is all I ask. I am doing, and I mean to do, as you wish by Anne; be satisfied, I beg."

And looking into his wife's white face, he came to the conclusion that he had better leave her alone. If he did not, there would be *a scene*. And that was what Robert, in common with the majority of his sex, from the bottom of his heart detested. At the same time he told himself that *perhaps* he was a little hard upon Catherine, and after all it was the nature of mothers to cling to their young ones, and it *had* come upon her suddenly, and she was—*only a woman*, and a very warm-hearted, impulsive, romantic woman too. He must be a little gentler, and make allowances.

"Come, ma," he said, drawing up to the table, and patting the listless hand that lay on the now finished dress; "cheer up, and don't look like Mrs.—what's-her-name?—that cried herself to stone for the loss of her fourteen children. She had something to cry for, I grant you; and they were all *boys*, too, if I remember rightly. You will want some money; shall I draw you a cheque?"

"When you please. There is no immediate hurry. Of course there will be a good many things to get, but I will be as careful and moderate as I can."

"Careful and moderate—yes. But you need not practise any extreme economy. I wish Anne to have a really nice outfit; I wish her to have all that is necessary, and a little more. I don't want any cheese-paring; there is no need of parsimony. Miss Wreford must take her proper position among her companions."

"Very well; but you have not told me when our preparations must be complete."

"I find I cannot take her before the end of January. The regular term commences earlier, but charges are made from the exact day of entrance. Madame will send in her account monthly, which will be paid in advance, after Miss Rose's fashion. On the whole, it is the best way, and there is nothing like ready money. Let me see! You have a good five weeks before you; plenty of time, I should say, to get half-a-dozen girls ready for their school, eh?"

CHAPTER X.

GOING SHOPPING.

As soon as possible Catherine began to look through Anne's modest wardrobe, and to calculate what might be renewed and what must be replaced by entirely new articles. It was arranged that the shopping should be immediately attended to; "because," urged Anne, "it is a bad time to go about in the City the week after Christmas Day, and I am afraid if we leave everything till the New Year sets in we shall be all in a scramble at the last. Oh, mother, shall I have a *silk* dress? I never had one in my life!"

"Silk dresses have not been necessary, my dear. I had but one silk dress before I was married, and that was black, and quite inexpensive; and I turned it, and returned it, and 'made it over,' as the Americans say, I don't know how many times, before at last I cut it up for aprons."

"Were you married in a silk dress, mother?"

"Yes, in a pearl-grey silk; it was dyed blue soon after you were born. But as regards yourself, I believe I may

promise you all you wish, in moderation. I was thinking of getting a nice useful dark silk, and a pretty light one for evening wear and special occasions. And, of course, you will want warm winter dresses. I have heard that Paris is a very chilly place in the cold season."

"Mademoiselle says there is no place in all the world so delightful to live in as Paris; but she admits that it is by turns an ice-house and an oven. Dear me, mother, how busy we shall be! And I shall want boots and brushes and combs, and a new umbrella, and no end of gloves—oh, and thousands of things."

"Not quite so many, I hope. Suppose you take paper and pencil, and put down all you know you *must* have on one sheet, and all you would like to have on another. Then I will ask your father how much money we may spend, and to-morrow we will go betimes into the City."

And so Catherine went on continually talking about the clothes that had to be bought and made, and even discussing their fashion and texture, for in continual occupation of both mind and fingers seemed to lie her only refuge. Above all, she dreaded lest Anne should be seized with sudden reaction, and begin to war against her fate. If the child should fret over the sentence, the inexorable sentence of exile pronounced against her; if she should shrink back from the ordeal as the time approached; if she should struggle all vainly to escape the fiat which had gone forth, her mother felt that she herself must force side with her, and take part against her husband. And she had promised Robert that she would do nothing and say nothing to prejudice Anne against the career laid out for her, and especially against the change which so speedily awaited her. For oh! how soon would those five weeks pass away!

Next morning, at breakfast time, Catherine, according to promise, asked Robert how much he wished her to spend on their daughter's outfit. Robert, for answer, drew out his private cheque-book, and dipped his gold pen into the ink. He went to a side-table, and sat there for several minutes in silence, his pen suspended over the blank paper. "I really don't know what to say," he

observed presently. "Perhaps I had better let you have *carte blanche*."

"That means you would rather leave it to my discretion."

"Yes; I can trust you. I never knew you to spend money foolishly yet. All I have to say is, avoid parsimony on the one hand, and extravagance on the other. Choose the best materials; plain and good, you know, is always my maxim. Have nothing to do with cheap rubbish, and don't go to any bargain shops, or have anything to do with 'sellings off' and 'alarming sacrifices.'

"You need not tell me that. I never enter a shop when that sort of sale is going on, unless it be one at which I am accustomed to deal. I intended to go to *Hitchcock's*; we can get nearly everything we require there without running about from place to place, and there is sure to be a choice."

"You could not do better. There! I have drawn a cheque for £30, and made it payable to the firm. Tell Mr. *Hitchcock*, or one of the partners, who you are—he knows me and I know him; we have transacted business more than once—and he will let you have all you want over and above what the £30 will pay for; and he can send in his bill as soon as he likes, the sooner the better when you have completed your purchases."

"I am sure £30 will be ample; at least, I think it will."

"And I think it will not. Anne ought to have all new under-clothes, new and substantial; for you must remember she will have no mother to patch and darn for her in Paris, and I hope she will be better employed than in mending worn-out things. Considering what her future is to be, she scarcely need apply herself to such a feminine accomplishment as plain needlework."

"Do you really want me to grow up into a young man, father?" asked Anne, gravely.

"I never want impossibilities, Anne," replied Robert. "You were born a girl, and you must grow into a woman; but not into an ordinary woman, given to stitching, and pickling, and preserving, and strumming on the piano. The duties of a man, the privileges, or rather many of the

privileges, of a man, await you ; therefore it behoves you to qualify yourself, by every means in your power, for the position you are to fill."

"Shall I ever be your partner, father ? "

"I hope so. That is what I am fully intending. My son would naturally have become my partner in due time, and, lacking a son, I put you in his place. You will be a clerk at first. You must *learn* your business, you know, just as if you had no personal connection with the head of the firm."

"The firm ! how funny ! Why, some day or other it will be 'Wreford and Daughter,' then ? "

"Substantially, yes ! But I do not know that that will be our general style and title. It sounds peculiar, you see."

"Very peculiar !" said Catherine, dryly.

"We must not mind peculiarities. It is wise to get out of the grooves, sometimes. They may do for incapable folk ; but where should I have been had I rested content with my trade at Worbridge ? The utmost I could have anticipated, had I been so unambitious, would have been setting up for myself in a very small way when I was getting elderly, and droning my life out as a petty country shopkeeper, till I died in harness of mere old age ! And where should I be now had I been willing to remain a mere understrapper with Bright and Hankins all these years ? Perhaps at this moment I should be anxiously looking out for a new situation, and beginning life afresh at five-and-forty ! If we all kept to our ruts, the whole world would stagnate. I should think it would spin down like an exhausted teetotum some fine morning, and cease to revolve upon its axis."

Anne thought this was very fine talking, and she listened with all her ears, and made mental notes of the discourse. She looked to see what her mother would reply ; but Catherine only said, "In getting out of the ruts one must be careful not to run off the rails."

"Ruts and rails are such different things, my dear," returned Robert, with an air of superiority, which he sometimes affected, "that they can scarcely be compared. Your figure of speech is involved ; things that go upon rails are not likely to get into ruts."

"Still, they are the same sort of things, carriages, waggons, what you will; and they all go on wheels."

"Granted," replied Robert, sententiously; "but there are wheels and wheels, and those which rumble along in the common ruts would not go at all on rails. Women should never attempt to argue, my dear Catherine; they make such a mess of their metaphors, besides doing the whole thing as illogically as possible. Keep to your pies and puddings and shirt buttons, ma! and don't trouble yourself about what you do not understand."

Catherine was silent. She was not addicted to the vice of contending for the "last word." She rarely disputed with her husband, and never where something of vital interest was not concerned. Indeed, I believe women generally avoid contention with the men they *truly* love; a selfish woman, who loves herself pre-eminently, will contend with her husband or lover for any trifle; an unselfish one will gladly concede any point which does not involve the sacrifice of a principle, and is sure to be happier in self-abnegation than in self-assertion. And partly from long habit, and partly because Robert was still far dearer to her than she at all supposed, Catherine could no more battle for that traditional feminine prerogative, the "last word," than she could go out into the world and declaim in public from a pulpit or a rostrum. Mrs. Wreford was a downright womanly woman, though she was fain sometimes to confess that women had rights—not of suffrage—of which they were unjustly deprived.

But though the wife held her peace, the daughter did not. Anne had grown wonderfully fearless since the last Sunday night, and she spoke out bravely: "Father, I think mother is right; at any rate, I know what she means; whether it's ruts or rails it comes to the same thing, it seems to me. One must be careful not to go too far; one must not be rash; and at the same time one need not go plodding along like heavy carts in muddy lanes. And that is about what mother meant, I fancy, though I make a bungle of it, as she did."

Robert looked surprised, and for the moment not quite pleased. He was so unused to contradiction at home that he involuntarily resented the smallest approach to it.

However, Anne being just then in high favour, he contented himself with a glance of mild rebuke, and the remark that she was quite too young to make explanations of the speeches of her elders. And then the breakfast-party broke up, the cheque still lying by Catherine's plate.

She put it into her purse, and desired Anne to be ready in an hour's time; it would not do to be later now the days were so short, and it was so undesirable to buy things by gaslight. Nevertheless, the gas was lighted before they left St. Paul's Churchyard that evening, as was also the case on the following evening, for it took two full days for Catherine and Anne to do all their shopping, and even then many less important articles were left over to another opportunity. And no sooner were the parcels sent home from *Hitchcock's*, than Catherine began calculating and measuring and cutting-out, apparently so full of energy that she could not waste a minute; and Anne exclaimed, "Mother dear, what a bustle you are in! you will make yourself quite ill if you don't take care; you must be awfully tired; I know I am. I should not like to go shopping every day, for, though it is amusing, it fatigues one! But it is great fun seeing so many pretty things and having to choose, and the shopmen so attentive, thinking nothing of their trouble! And then it is a treat to dine at the pastry-cook's, though I suppose I should get tired of ham sandwiches and raspberry puffs and ginger-beer, after a little while."

But her mother only replied, "This length of calico will make you just four night-dresses, Anne; I will get one ready for you to-night, so that you may set to work directly after breakfast to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow is Saturday, mother. Had we not better make a start on Monday morning?"

"Why should a day be wasted? Next week will be a broken one, for Thursday will be Christmas Day. You may manage the seams to-morrow if you are industrious. This flannel is better than it looked in the shop, Anne; I am glad I did not take that remnant of Bath-coating; I so much prefer a good Welsh flannel."

And so Catherine talked on, always about the garments and dresses that were to be manipulated. Anne had all she wanted—warm woollen dresses for every-day wear, a neat dark silk for Sundays, and a pretty light check silk for grand occasions; some furs, for which she had greatly longed, and a fashionable cloth jacket, trimmed with velvet.

"I am afraid the jacket was an extravagance," said Catherine, later in the evening, when Anne was showing it to her father, together with the new muff and victorine. "I could have made it myself at little more than half the price; but Anne tried this one on, and it fitted so beautifully, and looked so stylish, that I suffered myself to be persuaded."

Catherine quite expected the grave reproof which she believed she merited, but she did not expect what followed. Robert folded his *Times* as carefully as if it were one of Anne's new silks, and his wife knew by his countenance that a speech was preparing. "That reminds me," he said, with an air of gravity amounting to solemnity; "you generally make Anne's dresses, do you not?"

"Not generally, but always. It would, indeed, be a sad piece of extravagance to put them out when I can make them myself better than any dressmaker I know of. I think I must have some one in the house, though, for a week or so to help in the skirts and the plain sewing; for Anne and I will scarcely get through all this work without some help. Miss Plows goes out by the day, and she works well and quickly, and will do what she is told."

"You may have a few things done at home, if you will, and you can have Miss Plows to help you; but the best dresses must be made by a proper dressmaker."

"And am I not a proper dressmaker? I am sure I know my business."

"I should be better pleased if you would forget it. Suppose Anne is asked who made her dresses, and she has to answer, 'my mother'! People will at once suspect that you are a dressmaker."

"*Suspect!* They may be sure if they like. I am not ashamed of having an honest trade in my fingers. You do not mean to say you are *ashamed* of me, Robert?"

"Of course not—not of *you*! But I do not care for all the world to know Mrs. Wreford once served her apprenticeship to a dressmaker; that for—I won't say how many years—she was a dressmaker herself. The next thing will be to declare that you are even now a *dressmaker*!"

"And what then? You speak as if dressmaking were something disreputable, what you call '*shady*,' to say the least of it. I am sure the money I gained by my business, both before and after we were married, was extremely acceptable, and—and—I never was so happy as when I worked my fingers till they were sore, over other people's dresses."

"Catherine, you are so dull! you do not understand."

"No, I do not. I was a dressmaker when you first knew me, and when you courted me. I was a dressmaker all the years we were engaged. I carried on my business after we were married till Anne was born, and you never objected. Our circumstances are so much improved now, that my earnings are not needed; besides, with this large house, and two servants, and all the duties that fall to my share as female head of the family, I really have no time to make any dresses except my own and Anne's, and those, of course, I have *always* made, and shall continue to make if I am not hindered. I cannot think why all of a sudden you should be annoyed, because I learned and once carried on a decent business."

"Can you not? Do you require such very plain speaking, my dear? Yet, if you reflect, you must perceive that it is not in keeping with our present position, still less with that which I trust and quite believe will be ours in the course of a few years. No doubt the dressmaking was all very right and proper when you were young—it was praiseworthy, even; but circumstances alter cases, and it is not now in the fitness of things that *my wife* should be known as a person who once got her living by needle and thread. It would at once place Anne at a disadvantage with her new companions, as I am sure, child as she is, she must comprehend."

Then out spake Miss Wreford. "Father, I think I know what you mean, but I don't agree with you. I

think it's *mean* to be ashamed of any kind of honest work we do, or ever have done. And it was grand of mother always to support herself and help keep the house after she was married. If she had gone out for a charwoman, I should respect her just the same. Why, father, I have heard you boast that you were little better than porter and packer when you first came to London and went to Bright and Hankins'; and that you have raised yourself to what you are by your industry and painstaking. Why should it be less honour to a woman than to a man to work her way up? You say I am to work when I am a grown-up woman, and I want to; I should never care to be a fine lady. I admire people that work hard, and have their just reward."

Robert Wreford winced under this home-thrust, and he determined to be more reticent in future before that spirited young damsel his daughter. It was not the first time he had wished that he had been less communicative respecting his antecedents. Somehow, what used to be his boast had come to be his vexation; he was not nearly so fond of contrasting the present with the past as he had been formerly; he was fast becoming the victim of his own false pride, out of which grew the miserable false shame which now so much perplexed his wife.

But for a long time past this "dressmaking" had been a sore subject with Robert. He wondered how many of their present associates were aware of the fact that Mrs. Wreford had once followed a business; that she had "served her time," and "fitted on," and sent in bills to her "customers"! Worst of all was the time she once had passed as *shopwoman* in a fancy draper's employ. Thank God, no one knew anything about that unfortunate episode, for there was something painfully unpleasant connected with it, and Catherine never spoke of it, even to himself. Poor Robert, with all his cleverness, what a *snob* he was growing! He could not bear that the world should know his wife as a quondam dressmaker; and he would have been overwhelmed had any one ever guessed that Mrs. Wreford, of Ivyside, had ever, *ever* served behind a counter for even a short portion of her maiden life.

But when Anne spoke, he felt beaten with his own weapons. "Anne, you forget yourself," he replied, in his severest tones; "little girls should be seen and not heard. You have been spoilt at home; it is quite time you went to school. I hope *Madame* will teach you to address your elders, and particularly your parents, with a little more respect. Now go to bed immediately. You have been gaping this half-hour. Anne is getting into very bad habits, ma; see that she does not sit up so late."

Anne retired, feeling that she was *snubbed*. To be called "a little girl," and sent to bed like a child, just as she had persuaded herself that she was growing into a young woman, it was too bad! When her mother came into her room, as she generally did before going to her own, she said, "Mother, *was* I rude to father? He *did* seem proud of having begun at the very bottom of the ladder. I have heard him say those words oftener than I can count."

Catherine's answer was perfectly discreet.

"I am sure you did not mean to be rude, my dear; your father's views are a good deal altered of late, and you had better not refer to those old times in his hearing. His smallest wishes should be obeyed."

"But, mother, *won't* you make my new dresses?"

"Certainly not, if your father requests me not to do so. I know of a very first-rate dressmaker in St. Thomas's Square; we will inquire what she can do for us."

"Mother! I believe you would cut off your head if father said you had better."

"I should not go quite so far, Anne; but to the best of my ability I shall always obey my husband, and I hope my daughter will never forget that she owes all reverence and submission to her father."

"But why should he be ashamed of your having been a dressmaker? Dressmaking is *quite* respectable, is it not?"

"Quite, my dear! But the world has a certain code of social laws, by which it decrees, falsely enough, that women who work with their hands, however respectable and refined, are not *ladies*! And now I shall wish you good-night, for you ought to be asleep—and—and I think we will not revive this subject at present."

After that the days sped swiftly by ; Anne had plenty to do, and plenty to think about. As for Catherine, she seemed resolved not to give herself breathing time ; she found abundant occupation, notwithstanding the employment of the dressmaker in the square, who fitted Anne very nicely, and made up her silks and woollens in the prevailing fashion. Christmas Day came and went, and then the old year soon died out, and the new one commenced. And on New Year's Day something extraordinary happened. Anne had a little party of her own, for the first time in her life ! She was allowed to invite half-a-dozen or more of her young friends to spend the evening, and have games and a merry carpet-dance. And Catherine was glad of the diversion, glad of the extra occupation which the party gave her. She dreaded nothing so much as sitting still with her hands before her and her thoughts unemployed. Even Robert told her she was overdoing it, and would wear herself to skin and bone. And he had an invincible dislike to skinny, bony women.

Still onward flew the days. "It's always getting up and going to bed," said Anne one morning in the second week of January ; "and I seem to do nothing else but sit down to dinner. This day week might be yesterday, so fast the hours slip by."

At length there remained but one week before the departure, the 22nd being the day finally fixed upon. Then it came to the last Sunday, and some of the Wrefords' friends commented on Catherine's appearance. "She does take it to heart losing her little girl," said one. "Oh no !" said another, who had called at Ivyside lately, "she takes it quite sensibly and cheerfully. She seemed in very good spirits the other morning, but terribly busy, and I thought not at all well. She said, however, she was all right, only a little tired with the necessary preparations. A growing girl going from home, and to Paris, too, wants so many things."

And a third remarked, "Mrs. Wreford is more than tired ; she is wasting away. I never saw any one lose flesh so fast ; her clothes hang about her, and her wedding-ring is too large for her finger. I am sure

she is consumed with inward fever, and what a colour she has!—lovely, but decidedly *hectic*, you know. I should not be surprised to hear that the doctors declared her to be in a rapid consumption."

"But she has no cough, and she says she is quite well," urged the second speaker.

"And," pursued another, "I asked Mr. Wreford this morning how she was, and he said never better, only perhaps a little overdone! His wife was certainly a little too energetic."

"Ah!" grumbled an old maid, who had been standing by listening silently, "that's all very fine! Those men"—with disdainful emphasis on the noun masculine—"they never see what's going on under their own eyes! They never know their wives are ill unless they make a fuss, and they never imagine they are dying until the doctor pulls a long face and says, 'My dear sir, human skill can do no more!' Deliver me from the men, I say; they are a selfish, thoughtless, heartless, arrogant, conceited lot, and it's a pity the world can't go on without them. And cough or no cough, Mrs. Wreford is in a bad way, I tell you, and if her husband don't look after her he'll be a widower before this year is very far upon its way. But perhaps he won't mind *that*, and there are always plenty of foolish women ready to sell their freedom for a gold ring and a new name. I've no patience with them, not a bit!"

C H A P T E R X I.

PARENTAL COUNSEL.

AND after Sunday, the days to Catherine fled like hours, and the hours like minutes; she almost dreaded to hear the clock strike; she grudged the time that must be spent in sleep, when she and Anne were necessarily apart. She

would very much have liked to share her daughter's bed on those last nights, but she knew that Robert would forbid it as foolish and sentimental, and likely to awaken regret and home-clinging in Anne's mind. So she said nothing about it, and made the most of the child by day; and as Mr. Wreford, in anticipation of his absence from Fenchurch Street, remained later than ever at business, they were alone together for more than twelve hours out of the twenty-four. But as the clock ticked and ticked, and remorseless time sped on faster and faster, as it seemed to her, Catherine thought she knew how criminals must feel in the condemned cell, awaiting the moment of execution.

"You may as well have the trip, mother," said Robert, on Monday morning, as they sat together at their breakfast; "as far as Newhaven, that is. Of course you can go all the way, if you choose; I don't mind the expense, but perhaps it would not be so good, either for Anne or for yourself. But there is no earthly reason why we should not all go together to Newhaven; the change will do you good, for you are looking miserably thin and haggard, and you might just as well, or better, stop there till I return. At the farthest I shall only be two or three nights away. I think I told you we should sleep at Rouen."

"No, you did not. But I think I would rather stay at home; it cannot make any difference."

"You are exceedingly perverse, Catherine. However, I will not press it; it pleases you to make a martyr of yourself, I know. Constantly you accuse me, either directly or indirectly, of being unkind to you, of treating you with coldness and neglect, and when I do propose that you should take a little pleasure, and go about like other married ladies, you simply decline. It is extremely selfish of you; I wonder why women take so much pleasure in being contradictory, and in making themselves disagreeable!"

And Robert, feeling that he was justly provoked, pushed his plate aside, threw his knife and fork down with a clatter—very much as if he were a naughty child giving way to temper—and rose from the table. He

quite expected that Catherine would remonstrate—for she always made such a point of his eating a good breakfast—but she was silent, and buttered her toast as if she had not the remotest conception of what she was about.

“Mother,” said Anne, when the front-door had slammed to, proclaiming the exit of the master, “why won’t you go to Newhaven? I wish you would go all the way! I should keep you a day and a-half longer, and we should see Paris for the first time together, to say nothing of Rouen. Why did you refuse, mother dear?”

“Because I dare not trust myself. I cannot say goodbye to you in a strange place, and when I have said it I must be alone. Your father would be excessively annoyed and displeased if I gave him any trouble on the journey.”

“You never do give any one trouble.”

“I should give trouble if I were ill, and I should be ill, I am certain; the journey and the parting would be too much for me; I am not feeling at all well now.”

“I know you are not; you have worked too hard getting my things ready. But now you must rest. I do think, mother, it would be good for you to go and stay at Newhaven till father comes back; a little sea-air would freshen you up.”

“No, no! say no more about it; it cannot be,” returned Catherine, almost irritably. “If you have finished your breakfast, my dear, we may as well get to our sewing; it will be quite as much as we can do to complete everything.”

“I have quite done. I will ring then?”

“What is this about Rouen?” asked Catherine, an hour later, when both mother and daughter were busy with the needles. “I thought you were to take the short passage?”

“So we were! But yesterday afternoon, when you were lying down upstairs with your headache, father asked me if I were afraid of the water, and if I thought I could stand four, or perhaps five, hours of it without being ill. Of course I said I did not know, never having been upon a pond even in all my life! But certainly I would not be sick if I could help it; and then I said—‘But I

thought one crossed from Dover in about ninety minutes, even when the sea was rough?' and father replied, 'I have changed my mind, and that for excellent reasons—I mean to go by Newhaven and Dieppe.' "

"That is the cheaper, though the longer, route, I believe."

"Is it? But somehow, I don't think it was the cheapness that made father change his mind. He does not seem to mind so very much about a little money now. I cannot make him out."

"Nor I either. And now I come to think of it, the Dieppe route will be far the dearest in the end, because of the expenses at Rouen. The reduction on the passage money will by no means make up for that. But I cannot think how you will manage about the language."

"I dare say there are English hotels—that is to say, hotels where waiters, and perhaps the landlord, speak a sort of English that can be just made out. I have heard Mademoiselle say something of the kind. Then father knows a good many French words—he has picked them up, he says, as any one may, who lives in the world as he does. Though I doubt if a few words and phrases will help one much. As for myself, I know one or two sentences, and nothing more. I know, from listening at school, how to say 'good-day,' 'how do you do?' 'shut the door,' and 'if you please,' in French. That will not go far, I am afraid. But father says Rouen is well worth seeing; he calls it the Manchester of France."

"I am glad that you should see all you can. Things are so different from what they were in my young days; people travel so much more, and I suppose the rising generation—those who have their life before them—should keep up with the progress of the age. And everything seems to go so fast now."

"If only you were going, mother—if only you were going to live in Paris, so that I might come home to you every evening."

"My dear, there is nothing more unsatisfactory and useless than supposing suppositions. Your father cannot live in Paris, therefore I cannot."

"I suppose he would not let you live there without him?"

"I am quite sure he would not; neither would I consent to such an arrangement myself. It is held to be—well, not at all respectable, when husband and wife live apart; and your father thinks so much of respectability."

"I know he does; but I think one might be respectable, and yet give some sort of offence to the world—to what Miss Rose calls 'society.' She was always talking to us about 'society,' and its claims, and what we owed to it. And some of her talk seemed to me very reasonable and proper, and some of it very ridiculous. But, mother, what *is* respectability?"

Catherine smiled. "I think I know, Anne, but I never was good at definitions. Of one thing I am sure, that it has not so much to do with our circumstances and surroundings as with ourselves."

"It is not being genteel and lady-like, is it?"

"Certainly not. There is no word in the English language more perverted than that word 'genteel,' which has come to mean anything but what it really implies. Did you hear Miss Plows talking about some one for whom she worked, who was so very *genteel*?"

"Oh, yes! and I should call her—from what I have seen of her—vulgar; because she seems to me to have two sets of manners, one for private use, and another for company. She is very finikin in her speech, and she takes such pains to aspirate her *h*'s, that one wishes she would drop one now and then, by way of variety. And she would not be found doing anything useful, for the world. I am sure she pretends a great deal."

"She does, most decidedly. And pretension is always vulgar, and by no means respectable. Though pretension is not peculiar to any rank of society; I have seen it in people who are really well educated, and what is called well born; and I have seen it in people who were born and brought up in the workhouse."

"It must be very troublesome to be always pretending, I should think. But I wish I knew what it is that makes people really respectable, for I want to be quite respectable myself. Must one be *refined*—that's another of Miss Rose's pet words—in order to be respectable?"

"That depends, I should say, upon the kind of refine-

ment. A truly refined person could not help being respectable, because genuine refinement goes into everything, and would prevent you from speaking roughly to a servant, or even to a beggar, just as much as it would keep you from being insolent to your superiors. There is a refinement, my dear, that is pure gold; and there is a so-called refinement which is only an imitation, and which, compared with the other, is mere gilt—and gilt does not wear, and for every-day use is worthless, you know."

"Like Jane's grand brooch, that quite outshone yours the first Sunday she wore it. That was months ago, and now it is good for nothing. I saw it the other day, tossing about in a drawer in the kitchen, with the pin off, and looking just like what it really was—mere vulgar brass! And yours is as nice as ever, and will be always, I suppose; for if gold tarnishes, a touch or two with the wash-leather sets it to rights, while it rubs off tarnish and gold together when the gold is only a little bit laid on to make the outside fine."

"Just so; that is a very good illustration of true and false refinement. I am not as wise as your father, nor so well qualified to give you good advice; but this, let me say, very earnestly, Whatever you are, *be real!* Never pretend to be what you are not, but, at the same time, make the very best of yourself. Be gentle rather than genteel; be kind and loving rather than polite; speak the truth and live the truth; be ready to suffer yourself rather than wound the feelings of another; but, at the same time, make no terms with what you see and know to be wickedness, and never tamper with deceit—then I think you will be respectable and refined also."

"I should like to ask father what 'respectable' really means?"

"Ask him, then. For myself, I feel certain that respectability has its true foundation in the fear of God. I don't mean the *dread* of God—the fear of what He may do to you here and hereafter, if you displease Him—but the fear that belongs to love, and to love alone. You are not afraid of me?"

"Afraid of you, mother? No, indeed! How can I be, when I know how much you love me, and when you are

always good and tender. But I am afraid of vexing you ; and if I had done anything dreadfully wrong—got into an awful scrape, you know—I had rather have any punishment than see your grieved look."

" And that, in a small measure, should be the sort of fear you have of God—the fear that belongs to love, and must grow out of it. Of course, God, though He is our loving Father, and our best Friend, is angry when we carelessly or wilfully offend Him, and the just anger of one we love is a thousand times more terrible than the fury of another for whom we have no affection."

" Mother, I think I should break my heart if you were downright angry with me ; if you turned your face away from me, and I knew that I deserved it."

" That is the sort of broken and contrite heart that one should have for sin against God; grief that He is justly displeased, and that His face is turned away from us—as it always must be when we have sinned and not repented."

" Not been dreadfully sorry, that is ? "

" Something more than that. There is no repentance without sorrow ; but there may be sorrow without repentance. To repent is to forsake that for which we are sorry. People sometimes are grieved for their faults because the consequences actual or possible come before them, and I have known those who call themselves all the ' miserable sinners ' in the world, and heap revilings upon themselves, and yet do nothing to amend their ways. I really do think some persons fancy that calling themselves bad names, and making loud professions of their own inability to do any good thing, is religion. But we are going a long way from our subject, which was, to begin with, the meaning of true respectability. So then, I say—that is, it seems to me, for I never was very wise, nor in any way clever—that true religion and respectability go together. And it strikes me that a charwoman may be as respectable as a duchess, for respectability has nothing whatever to do with wealth or station."

" The dictionary says 'respectable' means 'worthy of respect.' "

" The dictionary says in three words what I have tried to say in so many. That is it, my dear—' *worthy of*

respect! Not exacting respect, not laying false claims to it; but *worthy* of it—worthy both in the inner and outer life."

"And, of course, what would be respectable in one might not be respectable in another. It is quite respectable in Mrs. Peglar, who comes here on cleaning days, to wear a clean cotton gown on Sundays, or that old merino you gave her the other day; but you would not be respectable in such a dress, would you?"

"Certainly not; because I should not be dressed according to my station. I may wear a good silk dress, because your father's income and position warrant it; and if I went about in shabby raiment without needful cause I should do him discredit. But I should be *not* respectable if I wore rich velvets and satins, and decked myself with lace and diamonds, any more than Mrs. Peglar would be if she went to chapel in a silk like mine, supposing she could obtain one. Respectability includes consistency in appearance."

"Then I wonder whether I shall be respectable in father's counting-house, by-and-by. Will it not be inconsistent if I grow up like a man?"

"Extremely inconsistent; but you may do man's work without being masculine. We will not talk about that, however, my dear; because as regards your future, I cannot see with your father. I should have liked to keep you for my own home-daughter, and I cannot; so I am afraid I cannot judge impartially of the advantages or disadvantages of the plan."

And then they were interrupted, several ladies—members of the congregation to which they belonged—coming in to say "good-bye" to Anne.

"A fine thing for you, going to Paris to school!" said one, who had vainly tried to persuade her husband into sending their own daughter "to finish" at a Parisian boarding-school. "I suppose you will come back too fine a lady to speak to any of us?"

Anne replied, with just a shade of contempt in her tone, "That might be fine, but it would not be like a lady. How is Eleanor?"

"She is better, thank you; but her neuralgia is still

troubling her, or she would have accompanied me. I told her she would catch her death of cold, if she would wear that thing of a bonnet, all off her head. And she said one had better be out of the world than out of the fashion ! Ah, Miss Anne, you will find all the new fashions in Paris. They will teach you to set yourself off there."

And Mrs. Willis, as she said so, thought what a shame it was that this gawky, brown-skinned girl, whom the best toilet in the world would never become, should have the advantage of a Paris education, while her own lovely, graceful Eleanor was doomed "to finish" in a third, or perhaps a *fifth*-rate school at Hackney ! How she wished her own husband were as liberal and sensible as Mr. Wreford ! How she wished her Frederick were like him ! How she wished it were her sweet, *genteel* Eleanor that was going to live in the *Champs Elysées*, instead of that awkward, rough-mannered Anne, who would never—no ! *never*—make any sort of figure in society. It was casting pearls before swine, that it was ! And Mrs. Willis scarcely knew whether to be the more aggrieved with the partner of her own joys and sorrows, who was as stolid as a Dutchman, and as obstinate as a mule, and as parsimonious as—she did not know what ! or with the father of this lucky girl, who presumed to give his daughter advantages from which she would never profit, and which would only result in disappointment. Somehow, her Eleanor was wronged by Mrs. Wreford's Anne's superior fortunes.

Eleanor was a tall, slim girl, with a complexion that her friends called "delicate" and her enemies "sickly." She had hair that her mother said was golden, and that her father affirmed to be *red*; he was never ashamed of his own crop of carrots, he used to say. She was supposed to be eminently graceful, and a pattern of gentility—chiefly because she clipped most of her words, smiled an artificial smile—her frown was genuine enough, as her little brothers and sisters knew right well—kept her hands very white, wore tight boots, and minced when she walked—like the daughters of Zion who exasperated Isaiah two thousand years ago ! The "Grecian Bend"

not having been invented, Miss Willis could not possibly adopt it. Eleanor was nearly four years older than Anne, but in real solid information and in practical sound sense she was several years her junior. All things considered, it was quite as well she was not going to be Madame de la Tour's pupil; she would have gained nothing except a little extra varnish, a little mental enamel, that would have come to grief at the very first exigency.

When Mrs. Willis and her friends were gone, Anne sat thinking what a foolish woman she was, and rejoicing that her own mother was so infinitely superior, so very much more of a gentlewoman! And yet Mrs. Willis had never been a dressmaker, or anything half so useful; she had lived at home with her papa and mamma, doing nothing but read romances, jingle tunes on a wiry, old piano, dress, dance, and perpetrate dreadful designs in wool work, till she changed the estate of maiden for that of wife. Mrs. Willis would have declared, and believed it too, that her antecedents were infinitely superior to those of Mrs. Wreford—in short, much more “respectable;” but knowing nothing of Catherine's earlier life, she was happily not in a position to make odious comparisons.

As for Catherine, she was all but provoked at the long stay which these ladies so inconsiderately made there; she was counting the hours that remained to her of her child's companionship, and these people came and talked nonsense and gossip for a full sixty minutes; besides which, she was really so busy that she had no time to spare for useless chatter. Nevertheless, she checked Anne when she began to talk scornfully of Mrs. Willis' exceeding foolishness, and of her daughter's silly, affected ways; but she told her servant that if any one else—except one or two, whom she mentioned—should call, to say that she was particularly engaged, and could not receive visitors.

And Monday and Tuesday passed, and Wednesday, the last day, arrived. Anne's heart began to fail her. She was a brave child, but her courage faltered as the hours sped on, and she wondered continually where she would be by this time to-morrow, how many miles away from mother and home, how long a time would elapse ere she

again saw either. If she had but known, if she had but guessed, that her father intended her to spend her holidays at school, she would have broken down, and cried like a veritable infant. But Robert was a prudent man, and dreading above everything "a scene," he took care to avoid all that might occasion one. Catherine, in her happy ignorance, was comforting herself as well as she could with the thought that her girl would be with her again some time before the summer was over. It was well for her, as for Anne, and certainly well for himself, that Robert kept his secret safely locked up within the recesses of his own bosom.

There was a fire in Anne's room that evening—an indulgence she very rarely enjoyed; but the weather was cold even for January, and a great deal of business had necessarily to be transacted upstairs. By noon the fire was burning brightly. Anne's new travelling trunk stood open, ready to be filled, and the bed was covered with heaps of clothing neatly folded. By tea-time, the packing, except a few *etceteras* left to the last, was finished, and Mr. Wreford astonished his household by coming home to a six o'clock tea. Not entirely to Catherine's satisfaction, for she naturally wanted Anne all to herself on that last evening, and not to Anne's contentment either—for she had been surreptitiously crying ever since dinner, and she did not want her father to see her swollen eyes and tear-blurred countenance.

He took no notice of her appearance, however, but read his evening paper all through tea-time with scarce a syllable. Catherine and Anne exchanged a few words, but they were too heavy-hearted to converse; indeed, nearly every subject was tabooed, for both felt that to discuss the circumstances of Anne's new life, or to revert to what she would leave behind, might occasion a regular break-down, such as would certainly provoke Mr. Wreford past all endurance. When the tea was over, mother and daughter went upstairs again; they had plenty of excuse for doing so, for Anne's work-case had to be stocked with needles and cottons, and she had just remembered that Madeleine had told her to be sure and take some soap with her, as soap was always an extra in French schools, and

it was generally expected that pupils would provide themselves.

All was finished at last ; the great trunk and the bonnet-case were locked and strapped, only the travelling-bag remained open ; and on a side table were the warm wraps Anne would require on the journey. Catherine had forgotten nothing that could conduce to her child's comfort. It was about eight o'clock, and both were thinking, "Now, shall we have a last talk ?" The mother feared Anne would be upset for the night if she once permitted herself to give way. Anne thought, "I would give anything to cuddle up to mother, and lay my head on her shoulder, and cry my fill, but I know it would be too much for her." And while she was listlessly turning over a drawer which used to contain some of her treasures, mixed up with a good deal of rubbish that had to be left behind, the clock struck eight, and some one rapped quietly at the door.

"Come in," said Catherine ; and Jane, the housemaid, entered.

"Please, Miss Anne, the master wants you in the study."

The study was a small room, which Robert kept for his own private use. He had his papers there, and a huge desk, which had been the first piece of personal property, over and above necessary clothing, which he had ever possessed. There were a few books, not many, and it was rather difficult to know why the apartment should be dignified by the name it went by. But when the master of the house shut himself up there, it was understood that he was not to be disturbed ; no one ever went near him, save his wife on very rare occasions when she was obliged to speak to him, and she invariably knocked before entering. Anne and her father had never been alone together in the "study" before that memorable evening. She went in now with some little trepidation, wondering what her father could possibly have to say to her. He saw she had been crying, but he would not appear to notice it.

"Did you want me, father ?" she said, standing on the threshold, with the door in her hand.

"Yes ; shut the door, and sit down. I have several things to say to you."

Anne obeyed, wishing the interview might not be pro-

longed. Why could he not put off the conversation till to-morrow evening, when they would be alone together at Rouen ?

" I wish to give you a few directions before you leave home," Robert resumed. " You are old enough and sensible enough to think rationally of the life before you. You will find school very different from home."

Yes ! Anne supposed so. School might be novel, amusing, and improving, but it would not be in the least like home. No need to impress that upon her mind. She did not reply, for she felt ready to choke. Her father went on, " You know very little about this school to which you are going, and I have been silent for several reasons ; one being, that your mother did not care to hear more on the subject than she could help."

" How did you come to know about it ? " asked Anne, with sudden courage.

" I spoke to a gentleman whose daughters I knew had finished their education in Paris, and asked him to recommend a good school, a Protestant one if possible. To which he replied that he knew of no Protestant school, and that the religion of pupils was never interfered with. Then he mentioned Madame de la Tour as a person entirely worthy of confidence, and in every respect qualified to conduct an establishment for young ladies. There are, it appears, several English girls already under her care, so you will have some compatriots to talk to, though the English are only permitted to speak their own language on Sundays, I believe. It is an expensive school, and you will have every advantage ; see that you repay me for the outlay, and for the sacrifices that your mother and I make in parting with our only child. Now, as regards religion, you will not go to Mass ; you will attend the Congregational Church in the Rue Royale. I have taken care of that, and made all necessary arrangements. I have undertaken to pay a suitable person to take you there every Sunday morning. More than once a day Madame could not permit ; her other English pupils and two Americans attend the services of the Established Church of England under the care of the English governess ; but that will not do for you."

"No, father."

"You must be very careful not to forfeit your privilege; you will always, of course, behave with the utmost circumspection when not under Madame's own immediate control. Of course, if they try in any way to influence your mind in the direction of Romanism, you will write at once and let me know?"

"Yes, father."

"And always be *English*—never forget that you are a subject of Queen Victoria. Learn as much French as you can, but do not learn French ways—be English in yourself always; be Protestant; above all, be a staunch Nonconformist. Remember who you are, and what you will be—that you represent the Wreford family."

Again Anne responded in the affirmative, but she felt very much bewildered. Till within the last few months her father had never spoken in this strain; she had no idea that as his daughter she was a person of any great importance. But of course, now that the business in Fenchurch Street was his, it made some difference.

"You will find things a good deal altered when you come back again, Anne," Mr. Wreford continued. "I have no wish to make a display, but I intend that the family shall be put on another and better footing. I mean to go more into society. I shall insist on your mother dressing more handsomely and more fashionably, and she must receive sometimes; and that dull Jane must be superseded by some one who understands the routine of a gentleman's establishment. I wish your mother was a little more ambitious. Yes, you will find changes when you come back to Ivyside."

"And when will that be, father?"

"I cannot say. It will be time enough to think about that when you have been some months from home. It will never do to lose time in just going backwards and forwards, and it would be a needless expense. Mind! I do not wish you to stint in anything. I shall grudge you nothing that you really require; but, of course, I cannot consent to foolish squander."

"I never thought of coming back before the regular vacation," said Anne, innocently, little dreaming that her

father intended her to remain stationary in Paris for at least a year and a-half. "But, of course, I shall look forward to the time. I shall count the days, I know, for weeks and weeks beforehand!"

"I should hope you would not be so foolish. Now, here is a purse for you, with pocket-money in it for the next three months. I shall allow you the same sum, for your own private spending, every quarter. You see how thoroughly I trust you! It is not often a girl of your age has so much money at her disposal. But I wish you to know the value of money, and to learn how to spend it wisely. Never borrow, never go in debt. Keep within your income, but do not *hoard*! It is always prudent to keep a little reserve, but I should be sorry for you to contract parsimonious habits. Here, take your purse, and mind you do not lose it."

"Oh, father! how shall I ever spend so much? And mother has supplied me with every little thing I possibly can want."

"You cannot tell what you will want. You will need many things you do not think of now. You will not find it too much when you come to spend it; though I trust, and, indeed, expect, that you will find it *enough*! Stay—I have something else for you."

"Oh, father—a *watch*!—for my very own?"

"Yes; you will require it. And you will doubtless find your companions provided in this respect. It is only a silver one—quite good enough for the present."

"Oh, quite—quite! Thank you, father, ever so much! It is the prettiest little watch I ever saw! What a pity I did not have my dresses made with a watch-pocket!"

"I wish you to learn the value of time as well as the value of money."

"Father! how long am I to be at school altogether? How much time for study have I before me?"

"Probably more than three years. I shall allow you to remain at school till you are sixteen; by that time I hope you will speak both French and German fluently. Then I shall take you in hand myself, and you will come into the counting-house."

"One thing more, father—how shall we get on when

we find ourselves in France to-morrow evening? How shall we make people understand us?"

"I have thought of that, and arranged to travel with a gentleman—one of my customers, who has business in Rouen, and is going on to Paris. He speaks French as well as English. That is one reason why I altered my plans. I determined to take the Newhaven and Dieppe route, instead of going by Folkestone or Dover, as I had intended. That is all; I think you had better go to bed early, for we must be stirring betimes in the morning. You had better wish me good-night now."

Which Anne did, resolving, however, not to go to bed as long as her mother would allow her to sit up. And Catherine, when she heard of her dismissal, for once consulted her own inclinations, and desired Jane to bring her supper up with Miss Anne's; the master could take his meal alone on that one occasion. And long after Robert was sound asleep, Catherine and Anne sat talking and crying over the fire, till at last both were so tired out that they were fain to go to bed for very weariness.

CHAPTER XII.

VIA NEWHAVEN AND DIEPPE.

We will not attempt to describe that parting. It came and it passed, in all its agony, and even Robert looked anxiously at his wife, as she stood, after Anne had got into the cab, white and tearless, and motionless as the marble Niobe he had once told her she resembled. He even ran back to speak a private word to the cook, whom he saw standing in the background; and what he said was: "See to your mistress when we are gone; give her a glass of wine, and say that I ordered it; and get her some nice little thing for dinner."

Anne was drowned in tears ; she cried all the way to London Bridge ; and when she got there looked as dismal and as ugly as she well could. Her father, as he silently contemplated her swollen features and blistered cheeks and blood-shotten eyes, wished she were not so decidedly ill-looking ! It was too bad, having only one child, and that one a girl, that she should take after neither of her parents ; and yet people had said that she was " very like her father ! " Mr. Wreford, as he watched her woe-begone, disfigured countenance, did not feel flattered as he recalled the fact. And yet it was the truth. Anne was wonderfully like him in expression, if not in feature, and she was more like him in disposition than he himself at all suspected, though he had boasted lately that she was *his* daughter, and in no way resembled her mother. By the time they reached Croydon, however, Anne had cheered up a little, and begun to be interested in the journey ; long before they came to Red Hill she was thinking she had never travelled such a distance in her life, and by the time the train slackened speed at Newhaven she was so thoroughly wearied, she could scarcely keep her eyes open.

It was a bitterly cold day, sunless, and almost freezing, with the wind blowing from the north-east. The steamer was not quite ready, so they went into the hotel, and there they were met by Mr. Rutland, who had just come on from Brighton. Anne being tired and miserable, did not feel disposed to respond to his civilities, and he set her down for a sulky little girl, ugly enough to frighten the crows. He almost repented having agreed to travel in her company, for he disliked ugliness, and had a perfect horror of feminine ill-temper. He was a young man, and it did not occur to him that the poor child was almost broken-hearted, and feeling actually ill. In fact, she had cried till she could cry no longer, she had slept little during the night, and she had in vain attempted to make the good breakfast enjoined upon her. He did feel a little sorry for her when he saw how she tried to drink some coffee, and how she shuddered and put it down, turning sick after the first taste.

"A bitter morning," said Robert, who was making up

for earlier deficiencies with hot tea, toast, eggs, and rolled spiced beef. "I am afraid it threatens snow."

"It does look like it. Never mind; it will not come before we get to the other side. And perhaps we shall leave it behind us."

"What sort of passage are we going to have?"

"Not a very favourable one, I fear. Last time I crossed the sea was like a mill-pond; but then we had a fog—it was in November. There is always something. It is your first experience, is it not?"

"Yes; my longest voyage hitherto has been to Harwich from London Bridge. I have never trodden any soil but that of my own land. You know the Continent pretty well, Mr. Rutland?"

"I think I may say I do. I was at school at Passy for five years, and I had a year or two at different times in Belgium. Then my last studies were completed at Bonn. I really saw very little of my native country till I was almost of age. I felt quite like a visitor at first, in England."

"And you have found your foreign education of use to you as regards your business?"

"Of the utmost use. Indeed, it was with a view to the position I was to take in our house that my father had me so completely educated abroad. Since I attained my majority he has left the Continental transactions entirely in my hands, as you know."

"Your father was a wise man; foresight is half the battle in life. I hope my daughter will profit by the advantages she will now enjoy, as fully and as satisfactorily as you have. I wish her to speak French and German perfectly."

"She knows the elements of both, of course?"

"No, I am sorry to say she does not. There I committed an error; it was not till within a very recent period that I determined upon the kind of education she should receive. I wish I had made up my mind earlier, but events so shaped themselves that I could not well do otherwise. However, we must make the best of our time, now that we are setting to work in downright good earnest—eh, Anne?"

"Yes, father!" snuffled Anne through her nose. She spoke like a person suffering from the most malevolent of influenzas. She had shed more tears, she believed, during the last twenty-four hours, than in the whole course of her previous existence; for she was not a crying subject, constitutionally looking on the bright side of things; and then, as she pathetically told herself, poor child—"she had never been really miserable before!" Mr. Rutland hearing the thick, nasal utterance, and seeing the heavy expression of her face, made up his mind that Miss Wreford was an uncommonly dull, stupid, plain-looking, and probably sulky girl; and he thought it was almost a pity that Mr. Wreford should be wasting money and expectations upon her; and he said to himself, "With that lisp and snuffle, and woolly articulation, she will never speak any French but the French not spoken in France."

By this time the steamer was ready to start, and the bell was ringing loudly as a signal to the passengers to embark. "All your luggage is on board, I think?" said Mr. Rutland.

"Yes; all except these bags, which we can carry in our hands."

"Is it registered?"

"Yes, to Paris; my daughter carries with her all that she will require to-night at Rouen. And we have through tickets."

"Yours is 'return,' of course?"

"Well, no. I thought I would be extravagant enough to come back home by way of Calais or Boulogne. I want to see Amiens, and if possible Abbeville. It is time I knew a little more about the Continent; and I thought, having actually crossed the Channel, it would be a pity not to take in all I could."

"Exactly. I should recommend you to visit Amiens by all means; it has a considerable trade, and is a place of commercial importance, though not equal to Rouen. The cathedral, too, is a splendid edifice, one of the finest in the country—some people say, in Europe. By all means, vary your route on the return."

In another minute they were all on board. Robert ad-

vised his daughter to seek the ladies' cabin, and establish himself there at once, under the protection of the stewardess. But Anne pleaded to remain on deck a little while; the air would do her head good, she thought.

"Is it very bad?" asked her father, compassionately.

"I never had such a dreadful headache in my life," was the reply; "I can scarcely see."

"Oh, that comes of fretting."

And then, turning to Mr. Rutland, he exclaimed, "She is not always such a cry-baby, but it is the first time she has been separated from her mother, and she is rather spoilt, I am afraid."

Anne felt quite grateful for this speech. Some instinct told her that Mr. Rutland's opinion of her was the reverse of favourable; and she could not be surprised, knowing what a fright she looked, and how stupid she must appear, answering in monosyllables, and with a splutter that exasperated her as she involuntarily made it. For the first time since their meeting, Mr. Rutland regarded her kindly. Anne had not liked him at first, but now, she thought, "What a sweet smile he has! And he looks as if he meant all he said, and as if he were all he seemed to be." Anne, of course, did not know it, but she was a born physiognomist, and she was gifted with that inexplicable perception of things, which is sometimes called intuition, and sometimes "the sixth sense;" that mysterious sense which they who have it not cannot comprehend any more than a blind man can comprehend the mystery of colour, or a deaf man the joy of perfect harmony, and, failing comprehension, are more than sceptical of its existence.

They were soon out of harbour, on the grey, rolling waves, steaming away, under a grey sky, from grey cliffs, towards a still greyer horizon. The gentlemen muffed themselves up as well as they could, and Anne put on an extra shawl, and seated herself on the lee-side of the vessel, which was towards France, while at the same time she watched the space widen between her and the shores of her own dear land. Keen as was the breeze, it relieved her head and cooled her burning face, and she determined not to go below if she could help it. Meanwhile, Robert

himself began to look miserable; he turned pale, shuddered, experienced a wretched sense of nausea, and complained of intolerable pains in his inner man, and every minute the sea grew rougher, and the steamer began to pitch and toss and roll and lurch, and play every gambol that a steamer thwarted by wind and wave can play.

"You are going to be ill; you had better go downstairs," said Mr. Rutland, seeing his friend's ghastly face.

"I am afraid I am. I do feel rather qualmish," returned Mr. Wreford, woefully. "Don't you feel queer?"

"Not in the least; I am never sea-sick—never was. I always enjoy a run across, however bad the passage. It's a splendid sea, is it not? I see breakers ahead! We shall have a fine toss in about half an hour, especially if the wind sets dead against us, as I quite expect it will."

"Ugh! you are a Job's comforter, Rutland. Ugh—ugh! I feel as if I had taken twenty emetics."

"Never mind!—do you good afterwards!—excellent thing for the liver. Just give yourself up to it, and think how well you will feel to-morrow, or next day, at latest."

"Ugh—ugh—oh! *ugh!!*" was all the answer that the unhappy victim of *mal-de-mer* returned. In five minutes more they got into "the trough of the Channel," or so some one said, and Robert was in all the agonies of the fearful malady. Mr. Rutland saw him into the gentlemen's cabin, and left him there. He knew there was no hope for him till they were high and dry on Dieppe Quay; the demon had got him in his grip, and would hold him fast to the last moment of the voyage. Neptune showed no favour to the despotic Mr. Wreford, who was lord of all he surveyed in the Fenchurch Street warehouse and at Ivyside. He thought, more than once, how sorry Catherine would be for him could she see him in such piteous plight, such miserable straits!

Mr. Rutland went back on deck to see how his other fellow-passenger fared. Deserted by her natural guardian, he felt that he was bound in common humanity to look after her a little. He found her quite well, and even enjoying the motion of the vessel; her headache was

almost gone, she said, and, on her own account, she was glad that the waves ran so gloriously high. It was a splendid sight, and the sensation was delightful!

Mr. Rutland quite concurred, and he began to talk to her. The snuffle was gone, as well as the lisp ; the voice was almost clear, and wonderfully musical for so young a girl ; the face, though still pale and rather sodden, was beaming with intelligence. The young man changed his mind ; she was bright, and even clever ! She was certainly *not* ill-tempered, and her manners were very agreeable—neither bashful nor forward ; she must have been most carefully brought up. He wondered what sort of woman Mrs. Wreford was. Mr. Wreford was an excellent business man, and bore the best of characters ; but—but there was something in his daughter's tone and manners which she had most decidedly not inherited from him.

In a quarter of an hour or so they were quite old friends. Anne was telling how much she had been pleased with the prospect of school life abroad, till the actual parting came, and she also told her companion what a dear, sweet mother she had—the best and sweetest in all the world, she was convinced.

“ Is she like you ? ” asked he ; “ or rather, I should say, do you resemble her ? ”

“ Oh, no ! not a bit ! Please don't think such a thing. She is so pretty—*lovely*—I think ! I can never grow like her in looks ; I shall be content if I can grow a little like her in goodness. Have you a mother, Mr. Rutland ? ”

“ Ah, no, Miss Wreford ; I wish I had. I have had, till within the last three years, a very good, kind, sensible step-mother ; but there can never be any one like one's very own mother, I am sure. Mine died when I was such a little fellow ; I knew nothing of the loss I had sustained.”

And so they talked on, these two, who had commenced their acquaintance, like Mr. and Mrs. Malaprop, “ with a little aversion.” And by the time the steamer got into quiet water, which was not till it was passing under the great crucifixes which seem to guard the entrance to the harbour of Dieppe, Anne had heard all about Mr. Rutland's sisters—one of whom, the youngest, would probably go to school in Paris at Easter ; and if Anne found her-

self happy and comfortable at Madame de la Tour's, she might very likely have her as a companion. And Mr. Rutland had been told a good deal about Ivyside, and about Miss Rose's school; but Anne had that nice sense of reticence—not too common in girls of her age—which withheld her from disclosing her father's views for her as regarded the Fenchurch Street business. She felt instinctively that this was between themselves, and that her parents would not like her to mention it out of the family.

Just before they came to anchor, Mr. Rutland went down to look after his unfortunate friend, and found him so prostrate that he declared he could not go ashore. As for Anne, he seemed oblivious of her existence. But on that account we cannot blame him very severely. He is not by any means the first parent who has been rendered unnatural by the cruel fiend sea-sickness—nay! we have heard of lovers, fond lovers, who were all the world to each other when they stept on board, regarding each other with perfect indifference ere they reached mid-channel, and till they were once more on dry land and free from suffering. But Mr. Rutland urged and scolded and coaxed, till Robert—the ghost of the man who had breakfasted so heartily at the Newhaven Hotel—came on deck. The colour had come back to Anne's face, she had been munching dry biscuits for the last hour, and now she was ravenously hungry. Mr. Rutland took everything upon himself, and it was well he did, for the moment they landed they were greeted, and almost seized, by *commissionaires*, hotel-keepers, drivers, &c., &c., who shouted in their ears what sounded like gibberish, till they were almost stunned and stupefied, and Mr. Wreford was in no condition to make any sort of bargain for himself.

There was no clearing of luggage, of course, so they pressed on at once to the railway station, where a few minutes were allowed for refreshment at the *buffet*—minutes of which Anne and Mr. Rutland failed not to avail themselves; while Robert languidly stirred a milkless, sugarless cup of strong green tea, and nibbled at a thin strip of cold dry toast, the most that he could do. He revived, however, on the journey, but fell asleep when about half way to Rouen, while Anne and her new friend renewed

their conversation, which continued till they came in view of the myriad lights of the ancient city, twinkling on the river banks far below them, and on the slopes and heights and over all the valley of the Seine. In another quarter of an hour they were safely sitting down to supper in the well-known Grand Hotel d'Angleterre.

CHAPTER XIII.

OUT OF TEMPER.

NEXT morning Mr. Wreford was a little out of temper. He had not slept well; he was still in a state of bile—which said state is never conducive to amiability—and he quarrelled with his breakfast, although, out of deference to his nationality, it was tolerably English in its aspect and component parts. Moreover, the weather was still very cold, and Rouen, with its deserted streets and wind-swept quay, looked melancholy enough. Mr. Rutland, who had breakfasted early, was already on the other side of the river, in the suburb of St. Sever, looking after the business which had brought him into Normandy; so that Anne and her father had it all to themselves in one corner of the long *salon*, in which there were no other guests, save three voluble Frenchmen jabbering away and gesticulating at the table opposite.

“If *that* is French,” thought Anne, as she listened and ate her cutlet seriously, “I shall never learn to speak it. It is not a bit like the French the girls used to speak at Miss Rose’s, nor is it much like Mademoiselle’s chatter either; but then, I never heard her talking to one of her own countrymen—she only said things to the girls, mostly things that they had heard over and over again. I remember how bewildered the first French class was when

that gentleman from Versailles came and gave them a dictation lesson. They said they could not understand him, though they could get on very well with Mademoiselle herself."

Anne did not know that Mademoiselle was an Alsatian, with an accent naturally Teutonic, the fact being that she was engaged by the principals with a view to economy, as she was qualified to teach both French and German; so that the Misses Rose, who only gave the young woman an extremely moderate salary, and charged separately for instruction in both languages, successfully killed two birds with one stone.

Anne grew very tired of sitting still, and listening to the unintelligible discourse of the Frenchmen. Her father found an English newspaper, and became speedily absorbed in its contents. He had scarcely spoken to the child, except to find fault with her, since his peevish "How late you are, Anne! I thought you were going to stay in bed all day; and this tea is cold, washy stuff, and there is something greasy, made of cheese. These people must have the stomachs of ostriches to eat cheese at their breakfast!"

Presently Anne thought she would go up to her room for a change; she had an English book in her travelling-bag, and she could read it, or at least appear to read it. She felt so perfectly stupid, sitting there in the great, dreary *salon* with nothing to do, and no one to speak to; for it was always understood that Mr. Wreford, when occupied with his newspaper, was not to be addressed, except there was an urgent necessity. How Anne longed for Mr. Rutland's return! She had looked at her new watch till she was ashamed of herself; surely it was terribly slow! But a glance at a clock in the room showed her that she was really rather fast—if Rouen time were to be relied on, which, however, she rather doubted, as she had heard, as she fancied, clocks striking all night long; they were striking till she fell asleep, they were striking when she awoke a little before the dawn, they were striking all the time she dressed, and they were striking now, and had gone on striking while she ate her breakfast. Some of them, she decided, must be altogether wrong!

At last she found courage to rise, and make her escape. She knew the way quite well to the room where she had slept ; it was not far up. Being mid-winter, the hotel was almost empty ; had it been the tourist's season, the new arrivals would probably have been lodged *au cinquième*. Anne rushed into her room, and almost as quickly rushed out again, for there was a *man* doing ordinary chamber-maid's work, and he did not seem in the least disconcerted by her appearance. She seized her book, however, and was on her way downstairs with it when she recollected that she had left her keys in the bag, wherein was her whole stock of money, her silver thimble, and her gilt-topped smelling-bottle. Her father had warned her not to leave that bag unlocked during their journey, and he would be seriously displeased should he discover her carelessness. And yet she did not like to venture back with that strange man in the room ; she slowly reascended, and again reached the corridor. She peeped through the crack of the half-open door, and saw that he was still there, busy with the washing-jug and basin ; so once more she retreated, but instead of going downstairs, she walked the whole length of the passage, and looked into several rooms, evidently uninhabited. They were very neat and trim, but very cold ; the black stoves and red glazed-tile floors giving them, to Anne's insular perceptions, a most glacial and uncomfortable aspect. And men-chambermaids, too ! What could be more disagreeable and improper ?

But with her keys still upon her mind she felt that she must be brave enough to invade her own quarters, and when she cautiously approached the door, she saw the obnoxious chamberman entering another room. He saw her, too, and grinned at her, as Anne thought, and addressed her in his own language. Miss Wreford, whose notions of "propriety," as instilled by Miss Rose, were certainly Puritanic, felt herself quite scandalised, and she took refuge in her own sanctum, and shut the door, rather brusquely, I am afraid, in the face of the Frenchman, who, after all, was a very harmless and good-natured person. He had little girls of his own whom he idolised, and he had a middle-aged wife whom he adored ; for married

couples in France, especially among the *bourgeoisie*, do sometimes love each other tenderly and faithfully, in spite of the adverse opinions of *nous autres*—the islanders! And good Jacquot could not see a little maiden of Anne's years, and not think of his pretty *fillettes* at home; and *la jeune mees*—she looked all *distracte* and forlorn, and he felt that he really must do his best to cheer her up a little.

Now, Rouen is the city of sweetmeats, and there is one dainty confection indigenous to Rouen called *sucre-des-pommes*, and Jacquot happened to have a piece of this delectable compound in his pocket; so just as Aune had locked her bag and put the keys in her pocket, having satisfied herself that her property remained intact and undisturbed, Jacquot gave a little tap, by way of preliminary, and entered, his honest face aglow, his *rather* grimy hands full of *sucre-des-pommes*, *chocolats*, and other delicacies. He commenced a studied harangue in his own tongue, of which, of course, Anne comprehended not a single syllable. Finding her to be, as he had suspected, a veritable *Anglaise*, he set himself to converse in English, and he commenced thus:—“Good little Mees, I have spoke the Engleesh! Nice *gens* the Engleesh! nice language the Engleesh! Me! I love always the Engleesh, but above all the *jeune* Engleesh Mees! Take *Mam'selle*—that is, *Mees*—take of the sweets of the countray.”

Anne looked dubious. But Jacquot was good and kind, she decided; he had soft brown eyes, and they smiled when he spoke, and he was certainly older than her father. She accepted a piece of *sucre-des-pommes*, but shook her head as he pressed upon her the other *bonbons*. He resumed—“Me—I have infants, seven at my *appartement* in the valley Darnétal—four brave *garçons*—boys, I mean; three angels of girls, and the most youngest, my *petite* Eloise, is just about your size and age, Mees. So I know that the *jeunes filles* love the sweetstuff. I pray you, Mees, take all—I have more for Eloise, and Marthe, and Melanie. Will you stay here long?”

“No,” replied Anne, beginning to feel at home with Jacquot; “we must be in Paris this evening; I am going to school.”

"Ah, the poor Mees! ah! that I am much sorry. The schools, they are cruel places. I like not the *pensions* for the *demoiselles*. They are so what you call streeete! You may not look up, you may not look down; you may not say this, you may not say that, nor do nothing that is against the laws, and I know a *belle demoiselle* who was half-starve in her Paris *pension*."

Certainly, Jacquot was a Job's comforter, and Anne's spirit fell to zero as she listened to him. She hastened to change the subject of discourse. "Why do you have tiled floors in your bedrooms here?"

"Truly, I know not, Mees; only it is convenable. Are not the floors of bedrooms tiled in England?"

"Oh, no; they are boarded, and they have nice carpets on them."

"Carpets? Oh! I comprehend—*les tapis*; well, here also are the carpets."

"Such miserable little bits! and a fireplace like an oven, and a washing basin fit for a doll. I do not think I shall like France."

"Not like *la belle France*! Ah, Mees, it is the most best and beauteous countray in the whole world. In England, it rain for ever, and the sun shine never, and the sky is never *bleu céleste* as it is with us. Oh, how *triste* a countray!"

"It is nothing of the kind," replied Anne, indignantly; "we have many days without rain, and our summers are warm and lovely, and the sunshine is beautiful. Of course, we have our wet days, and our cold days, and our cloudy days; but we don't often have worse days than this one in France. I shiver every time I look out of window, and inside the rooms make me shiver. But tell me, do men servants wait on ladies in their bedrooms all over France?"

"*Pourquoi non, Mees?* why not? In the hotels, that is to say; but here we have a *femme-de-chambre*, a real Englishwoman, out of Ireland, but she was not satisfact, and she went away. When the season comes again, when all the English do arrive, we shall have another *femme-de-chambre*, because the English Meeses and their mammas like best the women in their chambers."

"Of course they do," replied Anne, with dignity. "The English know what is proper."

"*Eh bien ! c'est ça, c'est ça !*" said Jacquot, shrugging his shoulders. "Some of this world is strange, very strange; but I must go, Mees, for there are not many servants in the hotel at this time of the year, and my hands are full—so full. *Adieu !*" And with his best bow, Jacquot departed.

When she once more returned to the *salon* her father was gone, and an olive-faced stranger was in his place, reading the English newspaper, and sipping *eau sucrée*. Several of the tables were now filled; people were dropping in to the late breakfast, and the waiters were busy taking orders, bringing in hot dishes, and running hither and thither, "jabbering," as Anne uncivilly called their talk, to one another, and to those whom they were serving. She felt extremely awkward; she did not like staying there now that her father had disappeared, and yet she had nowhere else to go; for the atmosphere of the fireless, red-tiled rooms upstairs had well-nigh frozen her. Oh, dear ! how dismal it all was ! She dared not think how sad and solitary she was, lest an access of home-sickness should overpower her. And her mother ! what was she doing far away in dear old pleasant Hackney ? Already it was more than four-and-twenty hours since she had left her, and oh ! what a long time it seemed ! It was as if a whole lifetime lay between to-day and yesterday morning. She felt very much inclined to cry, only it was babyish, and she did not want Mr. Rutland to come in and find her in tears. Besides, her father would certainly be very much displeased if she "gave way"—a process of mind, or nerve, for which he had a supreme contempt. On principle, Robert Wreford never encouraged *weakness* of any kind; "giving way," which included crying, fretting, fainting, and falling ill, was, in his eyes, one of the seven deadly sins, as strength of mind and a stolid, immovable exterior were chief among his cardinal virtues. And this Anne knew, and she determined that she would not "give way" till she was safe and alone in Paris, and her father on his way back to England.

Her meditations were disturbed by the entrance of Mr.

Rutland. Anne's face brightened as he approached ; she felt that he was a friend, and yet she had only seen him for the first time yesterday.

" Ah ! all alone, Miss Wreford ? " he said, brightly ; " where is M. le Papa gone ? I hope he has recovered from yesterday's trials and tribulations ? I have finished my business in St. Sever, and I am at your service. You must see what you can of Rouen, though it will not be much. Go and put on your hat, and we will lose no time in setting out for the Cathedral."

" But what will father say if he returns and finds I am not here ? "

" I will be answerable to Mr. Wreford ; I will leave a message with Madame Delafosse. She is an old friend of mine. If she had known you were alone, she would have taken charge of you, I am sure ; she is a kind, motherly creature. Make haste, Miss Wreford ; you must see the Cathedral and St. Ouen, at least."

" Oh ! and can't we go to the place where Joan of Arc was burned ? "

" If we can spare the time ; but it is already past twelve, and our train leaves a little after four."

With some misgivings as to what her father might think of her evasion, she ran upstairs to attire herself for the ramble.

" It's all right," said Mr. Rutland, as she reappeared. " Madame will explain to your papa should he return ; but she thinks we shall find him in the Cathedral, or in one of the churches, or somewhere. He took the guide-book when he set out."

It is not necessary to describe all that Anne saw during the next three hours ; for, in these travelling days, every one knows the Cathedral of Rouen, St. Maclou, the Place de la Pucelle, and all the other notabilities of the fine old Norman city. The Cathedral filled her with wonder and awe ; it was the realisation of her dreams of the " dim and mighty minster of old time," which St. Paul's, in London, was not. St. Ouen was even more beautiful than the Cathedral, and she had never pictured anything like the exquisite fretwork of the *façade* of St. Maclou. There was time for the Hôtel-de-Bourgtheroulde, and for the

Place, which, Anne said, made her feel "funny all over;" the story of the unfortunate Maid of Orleans seemed so very real on the spot where the dreadful tragedy was enacted more than four hundred years ago. She liked the old streets immensely; the grand *Rue de l'Impératrice* was not then in existence, and the ancient timbered houses, of which so many have been taken down to make way for the modern improvements, were still standing in the dark, narrow, and, alas! *dirty* streets, in all their picturesque solemnity. Returning to the *Hôtel d'Angleterre*, Mr. Rutland showed his companion the *Tour de la Grosse Horloge*, where the curfew is still rung every evening at nine o'clock, and the arch across the street, which reminded Anne of Temple Bar, except that it was smaller, and looked rather more venerable. Anne knows the Rouen of 1877, but she does not think it half as delightful as it was that cold January day when she and Mr. Rutland explored together its glorious churches, and dim, shadowy streets, and tortuous ways, and passed beneath the ancient belfry, where the great bell rang curfew for four long centuries, and rings it still, through winter darkness and in sweet summer twilight, to the busy Rouennese.

Mr. Wreford was at the hotel before them; he had been just ahead of them all the way, it seemed, only he had visited the *Palais de Justice*, and had not seen the church of St. Maclou. He was still far from amiable, and was much inclined to scold his daughter, both for leaving the breakfast table and for making the tour of Rouen, without asking his permission. Not that he really objected to either proceeding, but he was just in that unenviable frame of mind in which a man is ready, as the old saw says, to quarrel with his finger-ends, in default of any other victim. But he did not wish to expose himself to Mr. Rutland, for whom he had, somehow, in spite of his youth, a certain respect; so he controlled his irritation, and contented himself with telling Anne that she had done very wrong to stir from his side in the first place, and that she had caused him a great deal of unnecessary anxiety and suspense, &c., &c., to all of which Anne listened meekly, but without the smallest expression of contrition.

Mr. Wreford did not admire Rouen. He felt no interest in mouldy old churches ; he cared little for historical associations ; the streets were dark, ill-paved, and disgracefully dirty ; he had actually seen two dead rats in the kennel of the Rue Beauvoisine—then the principal street in Rouen ! As for the weather, it was execrable, ten times worse than in London ; but, in fact, he had always felt assured that the climate of France, and of the Continent generally, was absurdly over-estimated—some foolish people thought every country must needs be better than their own ! And so he grumbled on, all through the excellent luncheon which they were taking preparatory to their journey, till Mr. Rutland was almost tired of it. “What a regular cross-patch !” he said to himself, when he was settling with the waiter. “I had no idea Wreford had such a temper ; though perhaps the rough voyage has made him atrabilious ! And really, that is a very nice little girl, so cheerful and intelligent and well-behaved ! Poor child, she was only miserable when I thought her sulky ; and now that her features are no longer swollen, nor her eyes and nose red, I find her not at all bad looking. Those fine dark eyes, and that frank, animated expression, would redeem any face from actual plainness. I should not wonder if she grew to be quite a handsome woman, about forty or so ! There are some women who come to their best at middle age, and some men too. For the next few years Anne Wreford will be a thin, lanky, overgrown girl, with a sallow skin and an awkward carriage ; but she will be what people call ‘fine looking,’ and even attractive, when my sisters, with their pink and white complexions, and pretty airs and graces, are fat and faded, with nothing left of youthful beauty but its remembrance. I wonder what the girl’s mother is like ! If I were a woman, I think I should not like to be Wreford’s wife, judging from the specimen of temper with which he has favoured us ever since we left Newhaven pier !”

Once settled in the railway carriage, and fairly *en route* for Paris, with his rug tucked in about him, and a steaming foot-warmer at his feet, Mr. Wreford fell asleep, and left all the conversation to Anne and her new friend. Mr. Rutland knew the road well ; he had travelled between

Rouen and Paris more times than he could count, and he pointed out to her all the objects of interest as they passed them. He was well up, too, in old Norman history and folk-lore, and he beguiled the journey with telling stories, some fact and some fable, after it grew too dark to see the country through which they passed, till Anne quite forgot that she was very tired and on her way to banishment. At Mantes the train stopped for refreshment, and Mr. Rutland brought her a cup of nice hot coffee and some biscuits. Mr. Wreford still slept; they hoped after such profound and continued repose he might awake in a better humour. After Mantes, Mr. Rutland grew less talkative, and Anne's drowsiness increased upon her. The last thing she remembered was that some one tucked her up in her wraps, and put a rug, or something soft, under her head; and then she knew no more till she was awakened from a dream, in which the churches of Rouen and the dining-room at home were absurdly blended, to find herself in Paris, at the station in the Rue St. Lazare. The long journey was ended; Anne had reached her destination, and she must say good-bye to Mr. Rutland.

This gentleman attended to the luggage, and saw it carried to the *voiture* which was to convey Miss Wreford and her father to the Champs Elysées. Then he bade farewell, promising Anne that he would come and see her whenever he happened to be in Paris, which was never less than three or four times in the year. "You will be quite a Frenchwoman, Miss Wreford, when I see you next," said he, as he handed up her umbrella and travelling-bag.

"God forbid!" replied Robert, solemnly. "I would take her back to England to-morrow morning if I thought there was any chance of such a catastrophe. I wish her to learn French, and all that French can teach her; but I trust she will never forget that she is an Englishwoman, a Protestant, and a Nonconformist—and—*her father's daughter!*"

"Which should have come first," laughed Rutland to himself. "I had no idea Wreford thought himself of such immense importance! I am afraid he is just the least bit of a snob. I do hate snobs!" There was some

arrangement between the two men about meeting at the Hotel de Normandie, in the Rue St. Honore, at a later hour; and then the father and daughter rode away into the brilliantly-lighted streets of Paris, which, however, are not particularly delightful on a freezing January evening, with snow threatening, and a howling wind sweeping round the corners. Anne felt now how very tired she was, and she only gaped when she tried to enter into conversation with her father, who was quite fresh and cheerful after his long slumbers. Neither felt sorry when the *voiture*, which had turned into a quiet *allée* of the Champs Elysées, stopped before a large, high gate, which, being speedily opened by the *concierge*, admitted them to a courtyard surrounded on three sides by buildings; the fourth opened into a good-sized garden. Servants met them at the entrance, and showed them to the drawing-room, where Madame de la Tour graciously, and with the air of an empress, received them. A short discourse was held, and then Mr. Wreford rose to go, as the carriage was waiting to convey him to the hotel, where he and his friend were to meet at dinner. Madame kindly left parent and child to make their adieux privately, but Anne took the parting very quietly; her voice quivered a little as she said, "Good-bye, father; tell mother I am trying to be good and happy, and give my dear, *dearest* love to her."

To which Mr. Wreford replied:—"I think you might learn to call me 'papa,' like other girls in your station of life. Father is so old-fashioned, and sounds as if I were sixty, or perhaps seventy. Let it be papa and mamma in future; we will drop father and mother, I think."

"I will drop 'father,' if you wish it; I will learn to say papa; but I cannot drop 'mother.' I could *not* say mamma."

"Why not, pray?"

"I can hardly tell you; only mother is mother, and there never was a 'mamma' like her, and never will be."

"Foolish girl! You really are very childish, Anne, for your age. However, I will not scold you on the eve of separation; you will think better of it, and say 'mamma,' as well as 'papa,' in future, as an obedient daughter should."

Anne made no reply ; but when her father kissed her again, and bade her not be down-hearted, for her life would be very pleasant by-and-by, when she had got used to it, and was in full work, she responded with a quiet, unhesitating, "Good-bye, *papa*." The next instant he was gone, and Anne was alone in the *grand salon*, with dry eyes, a beating heart, pale cheeks, and an irrepressible desire to get to her bed, and lay her weary head upon the pillow in silence and in darkness.

Mr. Wreford went away, both satisfied and dissatisfied. He liked the austere and queenly style of Madame de la Tour; he liked all that he saw of the house and its appointments ; he was glad, too, that Anne let him go without another "scene." But there were certain misgivings which qualified the last-mentioned source of gladness ; he would have liked his daughter to evince a little, only a little, more emotion at parting with him. He remembered the agony of the preceding morning at Ivy-side, when the girl had clung speechlessly to her mother, and with a grief too deep for tears or for words had kissed her again and again, prolonging the mute embrace till the last moment—till he was compelled to interfere, and gently draw Anne away from Catherine. And then the rain of weeping, when the floodgates were once more opened, the uncontrolled passion of distress in which she had remained till they were actually in the railway carriage at London Bridge. And even then, as it appeared to him, she only ceased crying from absolute exhaustion, and because all her tears for the time were spent.

And now she bade him good-bye, with a certain pallor and sadness, no doubt, but with wonderful composure, as unlike the passionate storm of yesterday morning, as this wild wintry night was unlike a quiet, balmy summer evening. Robert hated "a scene," as we know ; but he did not feel flattered by his daughter's serenity in that supreme moment of separation. "I hope she is not heartless," he said, as he drove back down the Grand Avenue of the Champs Elysées ; "I must confess I should have liked to see a little more expression of regret."

CHAPTER XIV.

ROBERT IS STARTLED.

ROBERT did not keep his word to Catherine. He did not return to Hackney till the next Tuesday evening, partly because he was enjoying himself in Paris and Amiens, and partly because he waited Mr. Rutland's time, having discovered the great convenience of travelling with a companion who knew the ways of the country, understood the bothering coinage, and could " gabble away at his *parley-vous* as fast as any native!" And Catherine rejoiced to think she had not gone to Newhaven, for the thermometer had continued to fall ever since Anne and her father left London. The ground was covered with snow, which seemed very slow to melt. She shuddered to think how desolate it must be by the sad sea waves at this season of the year as she shivered in her own snug room close to a glowing fire.

She had a letter from her husband on the Saturday morning which told her that he and Anne had safely reached Paris, and that Anne was now under the care of Madame de la Tour; he could not exactly say when he should be at home, and she had better not expect him till she saw him. But, to tell the truth, Catherine was relieved rather than disappointed by his prolonged absence —left to herself, she could grieve as much as she liked; she dreaded his return, which must necessarily be the signal for another order of things than that which had prevailed ever since that miserable Thursday morning. The cook had implicitness obeyed her master's behests, and had "seen to missis" to the best of her ability. She had tried to administer the prescribed glass of port, but with such ill success that she was "obligated," as she told Jane, to drink it herself to prevent it being wasted; and, really, she felt quite upset and queer in her inside, seeing Miss Anne in such trouble as never was, and missis taking

on, till she was frightened to think how it all might end. She had known people die or lose their senses from less cause than there had been in that house for the last week or two—ever since it was given out that poor Miss Anne was to be sent to school in foreign parts.

But Jane, who was less talkative than cook and less given to demonstration, was not much afraid of her mistress becoming insane. She thought the kindest thing they could do by her was just to let her alone; “for the quicker she has her cry out,” she argued, “the quicker she will begin to get over it.” Cook was dubious, but decided that it might be better not to interfere yet awhile, even though the nice little dinner she served up was not touched; and orders were given to light the bedroom fire, as the mistress was going to bed, and could not see any one who might happen to call.

So the two servants ate the discarded dinner in addition to their own, and prepared to spend a comfortable evening by the kitchen fire. At four o’clock Jane carried Catherine some tea, and attended to her fire; at six she went again, and at eight she took her “a nice basin of gruel,” with a spoonful of brandy in it—Jane’s panacea for every kind of affliction, whether of mind, body, or estate. When she fetched away the tray, Catherine bade her make up the fire and not disturb her any more that night.

The next day Mrs. Wreford rose late, but she did not come downstairs. She looked like a ghost, both servants said; and cook thought she must be very bad, as she did not care at all what she had for dinner. She had said to her when she went to take orders as usual, “Get what you like for yourselves and for me, only I do not want much of anything, and do not disturb me; I will ring the bell if I need either of you.”

“She will have to bestir herself, though, to-morrow,” said cook, who was beginning to think that missis was “taking on” a little too much, when she might just as well have had nice little dinners and suppers, and a novel from the library, and somebody to drink tea and chat with her, and altogether enjoyed herself while master was away. And Catherine, too, was feeling that some effort

must be made ; Robert, when he returned home, would not expect to find things all sixes and sevens because his daughter was gone to school. In the abandonment of her maternal grief, she must not forget her wifely duties. She was still trying to rouse herself when the letter arrived, which released her from the necessity of present exertion, and thankfully she settled down once more to perfect stillness and such a state of inaction as she had not known since the week immediately following Anne's birth. For six long days Catherine did absolutely nothing ! She left the house to the servants. She did not wish to be told who called and wanted to see her ; and she did not even *think* for many minutes consecutively, because, as soon as she began to reflect, sleep overpowered her—a strange sort of sleep, which did not refresh her, for it was so much like stupor, but which, nevertheless, I believe, saved her from very serious illness. Had she been able fully to dwell upon her sorrow, the feverishness and headache which oppressed her would most likely have been developed into something worse.

I need not say she did not go to church on Sunday. She got up, and sat by the fire in her dressing-gown, and Jane put her Bible and hymn-book and several "good books" on the table before her ; but they were never opened. Her listlessness and drowsiness were combined with physical pain, and she shivered and burned all over by turns, and drank tumbler after tumbler of cold water all through that miserable Sunday, while the east wind whistled and moaned in the chimney, and the snow drifted across the desolate white garden, and the sleet drove in fierce gusts against the window-panes. Sometimes church-bells rang and tolled ; sometimes an omnibus-horn sounded in the distance ; sometimes she woke, and sometimes she slept, and sometimes she thought aimlessly about the merest trifles, and sometimes—especially in the twilight—she dreamed dreams that were not very far removed from mild delirium. In fact, Catherine was really ill in body—far more ill than she at all suspected. She thought she had fretted herself ; "given way," as Robert would have said, till she was downright poorly ; but she did not know that only the unbroken quiet, the absence

of outward disturbance, and the continued drowsiness, against which she scarcely cared to struggle, saved her, in all human probability, from a severe and dangerous attack of fever on the brain.

It was not till Tuesday morning that she once more came downstairs, trembling at every step, and feeling as if the lower rooms of her own house were strange and new to her. But Robert would almost certainly be at home that evening, and she *must* shake herself out of the lethargy to which she had succumbed for the last week almost. Nature had taken her full revenge for the over-work and strain imposed upon her ever since that eventful evening when Robert returned from Croydon, and imparted his designs. Mother Nature is very patient and long-suffering; but the day inevitably arrives when the cup of her just displeasure overflows, and she assumes for the nonce the frown and unrelenting character of Nemesis.

As the day wore on Catherine felt better—a little more like herself. And yet, as she roused herself to give some necessary orders, and took out her work-basket after tea, she had a curious sort of feeling as though she had died and begun a fresh life, rather than resumed the life which had been interrupted for a few days only. The first thing she saw in her basket was an unfinished cambric-frill that she had begun to make for Anne several months ago; it was not wanted now, but she took it up and went on with it, scarcely knowing why she did so. Her fingers shook so she could scarcely guide her needle, and in less than half-an-hour, having made very slow progress, and pricked herself like any bungler at sewing, she felt thoroughly tired out. She lay back in her chair shading her eyes with her hands, thinking: "What is the matter with me? I never felt like this before! And yet I have not been ill, and I have eaten more to-day. What is it? Why am I so weak and nerveless and stupid? Am I going to die? I feel like it. Should I be sorry? I think not; I am so tired—so *very* tired! And I know now that I have been tired a long, long while, only I could not rest. And yet I could not die without seeing my darling's face again. Yet, if God calls, I cannot but go. *His will be done!*!"

She spoke the last words aloud, and though they were

her own utterance, they gave her a strange, sweet comfort. "Yes," she resumed, "I have struggled and rebelled against God's will, and that is why the pain has been so very hard to bear. I have often heard it said that the burden of the cross is light and easy while we carry it willingly, and that it grows heavy and torturing when we refuse to take it up. Ah! my God! what a weak and foolish child of Thine I am, and how great is Thy patience and Thy love! Do with me as Thou wilt: let Thy will be mine.

" ' Our wills are ours, we know not how,
Our wills are ours to make them Thine ! ' "

And before she could say "*Amen*," she heard the familiar rattle of Robert's latch-key. She sat upright, and took a stitch or two, then he was in the room.

"Well, ma!"

"Well, Robert!" She could say no more; words of welcome died on her lips.

He came to her and kissed her, saying, "Well, and how have you got on all this miserable weather? By the way, it is thawing fast to-night. How soon will supper be ready?"

"Shall I ring and ask?"

"No, no! it is quite early; it has not struck eight. But, *good heavens!* what have you been doing to yourself? Do you know how you are looking?" And he turned the gas full on as he spoke; it had been very low ever since tea-time.

"Oh, don't! the light hurts me," she said, with a shrinking she could not control. "I have had such dreadful headaches."

"*Headaches!* You must have been very ill! You look as if you had been at death's door."

"No, I have not been ill, only very poorly. I think I must have taken a heavy cold. I had such fits of shivering, and was so feverish between whiles."

"And I dare say you starved yourself."

"I could not eat. I forced myself to swallow a little, as a duty; but I do not think food taken against one's inclination does much good."

"Good! I never saw you look so bad in your life! You have lost flesh; you have hollows in your temples, and black circles under your eyes, and your lips are white and parched! What have you done for yourself?"

"Oh, nothing particular! Just nursed myself in my own room, and kept warm and quiet. I have been as idle as a drone, and left the maids to manage the house as they would. I am better now. I wonder if there is such a thing as suppressed influenza?"

"I don't know; but you shall have advice. Did you send for Dr. Rayner?"

"No, indeed! I am not fond of doctoring, and it was only a bad, feverish cold, and—and—a little overstrain of feeling, perhaps. Don't trouble about me; tell me of your journey."

"Well, I left Miss Anne quite well and happy; the young puss did not make much trouble of saying good-bye to me. I suppose she exhausted her tears and lamentations on the Thursday. She cheered up wonderfully on board the steamer, and she and Philip Rutland struck up quite a friendship. I was down in the cabin, as sick as a dog, and ready to die. You'll never catch me taking that long passage again. I crossed this morning from Calais, and I felt horribly qualmish; but we made Dover before there was time for any real mischief. Crossing to Dieppe, you get worse and worse every hour, till you don't care whether you go to the bottom or not. I should think after you have been sick for a week or two, you would positively thank anybody who would heave you overboard! Ugh! I shudder when I think of it! I'll take you to Paris, ma, some time this summer, if I can manage to leave the business for a week or two; but we will cross from Dover. No more Newhaven and Dieppe for me, unless Neptune can be bribed to ensure a calm! You ought to see Paris, ma. And I have brought you a dress and a bonnet, and a box of something they call '*lingerie*.' All the maids and matrons of Hackney, whose fathers and husbands have not been to Paris, will turn pale with envy."

"Why do you call me *ma*?"

"Isn't it your proper style and title? I thought you were extra proud of your maternal claims."

"Years ago, we agreed that we were the child's father and mother; I cannot think of myself as '*mamma*.' And '*ma*' is positively hateful."

"Nonsense! nonsense! Don't make me cross, Catherine, the moment I come home. I am in the very best of tempers; don't put me out. I am really tired of disputes and grievances; only I think it best that Anne should call you *mamma*, and me *papa*, as other young people in her position do, and I told her so."

"What did she say?"

"She promised at once to call me *papa*, and she did so there and then; but she objected to your being anything else but '*mother*.' As we were just parting, I did not care to press it; but of course she will respect my wishes when she comes to think it over. As for you, I'll call you anything you like—'*Dame Dumpling*,' or '*Mother Goose*,' or '*Dolly*,' or—"

"Just as you please; I like best to be Catherine to you, and '*mother*' to Anne."

"As obstinate as ever! I wonder if Catherines—being also Kates—are naturally shrewish and self-willed! You ought to have married a *Petruchio*."

Catherine tried to smile; at that moment, she felt as little like a termagant as Robert felt like *Job*; but the smile only made her look more ghastly than before, and again Mr. Wreford declared he would have Dr. Rayner to see her on the morrow, whether she wanted him or not. She was evidently out of sorts; it was a clear case of debility and nerves; she must have nourishing things, calves'-feet jelly, and isinglass in her tea, and she must take quinine and port—that would set her up faster than anything. Nothing like tonics and nourishing food, when one had got below par! And that reminded him he had had only a cup of coffee since his early dinner in Grace-church Street, and he thought a glass of wine would do him good.

Catherine rose, and went to the sideboard. She opened it, brought forth the decanters, and put them on the table, together with a wine-glass. Robert filled it and drank it off, then said, "Come, my dear, let me fill it up again for you; I know Dr. Rayner will prescribe essence of beef,

quinine, and good old port! Drink it, now, like a good, sensible Dame Dumpling!"

"I cannot, Robert; indeed, I cannot."

"My dear Catherine, that is simply nonsense. I am not sure but that it is a little fib! You may not like to drink it, but you *can* drink it, you know, as easily as I drank mine. Take it as medicine; don't sip it. Take it down, and don't think about it, as you would a dose of salts and senna."

Catherine was standing on the hearth-rug, resting one hand on the mantel-piece. She was very white, and Robert said to himself, rather uneasily, "I don't like her looks at all! Is she sickening for any sort of fever, I wonder?"

He put the glass of wine on the mantel-piece beside her. How dreamily she looked at him! How odd she was! In all their married life, in all their long acquaintance, he had never seen her like this. He began to be frightened; if she had *really* taken Anne's removal to heart so deeply, he should have to blame himself! He had not come home for experiences such as these; he had half-prepared himself for reproaches, and for tears and sobs, and perhaps for a little genuine hysteria, when she saw him return alone; and he had quite made up his mind to be kind and patient, and to take into consideration her motherly and womanly weaknesses. He would make every allowance, even if she were "a little trying!" But that for which he had prepared himself did not happen. This was not temper; this was not hysteria; it looked uncommonly like very serious indisposition; and he could not have believed that any person not suffering from mortal malady could alter so much in the short space of six days!

"Do drink the wine, Catherine," he said, pleadingly, for he began to be actually alarmed. "What is it, my dear? What do you feel? Catherine, don't look like that! You seem to be staring at something a hundred miles away! Why don't you speak? Will you lie down?"

He was about to put the wine to her lips, but perceiving that she trembled, he threw his arm round her, intending

to lead her to the sofa. It was well he did. The next minute she was sinking on to the hearth-rug totally insensible. Robert gave a pull at the bell that brought the frightened servants at full speed into the dining-room. "It's fire, or else she's gone right off," exclaimed cook, as she abandoned the master's supper to its fate, and, pepper-box in hand, followed Jane, who shook from head to foot. Bells are never rung in that wild way in ordinary households except some terrible emergency has suddenly arisen. No such peal had ever sounded through Robert Wreford's house in the hearing of either cook or housemaid—the echoes might have reached the railway-station, they both thought.

"Help me to lift her on to the sofa," he said, hoarsely, as the women entered. "Bring water and smelling salts. Is there any *eau-de-cologne* anywhere? Go, one of you, to Dr. Rayner's, and if he is in, tell him to come to your mistress this moment! Do you hear? Don't stand staring at me as if I had told you to go to China."

Dr. Rayner, fortunately, was at home, and he was at Ivyside almost as quickly as his summoner. When he arrived, Catherine was just recovering consciousness, and dreamily wondering what had happened to her. He administered a restorative that he had brought with him; but he asked no questions till his patient was safely upstairs and in bed. Then he had a long talk with Robert, and the maids were called in, and desired to say how Mrs. Wreford had been, and what she had done, during her husband's absence.

"She's done *nothing*!" said Jane, emphatically, "and that's what I never knew her to do before. She kept in her bedroom till this morning, and scarcely spoke to either of us; and she never asked for her work-basket, nor opened a book, that I know of, but lay on the bed, or sat with her hands in her lap, so dull and drowsy-like, that unless she actually spoke I never knew whether she was awake or asleep. But I should say she did sleep eighteen hours out of the twenty-four. I used to go in of nights to attend to her fire, for it was bitter cold, and she seemed so shivery, and she never took any notice of me, and all the while she didn't eat enough to feed a sparrow, though

she drank pints and pints of water ! I wanted to put a little brandy into it, but she would not let me."

" Well ! what is the matter with her ? " said Robert, at last, impatiently.

" I cannot exactly say, " replied Dr. Rayner, gravely. " She is clearly very much out of health, and must have been so for months past. She is extremely weak, and there is a good deal of low fever about her. I don't like her looks, I must confess ; but I would rather not give an opinion till I have seen her again, and made myself perfectly acquainted with her symptoms. I shall take her first on my earliest round to-morrow morning, as soon as I have attended to the patients who come to me. Don't trouble her about anything to-night ; keep her moderately warm ; give her the medicine I will send in, and if she is faint again, let her have a good cup of tea—I don't advise wine, she is too feverish."

" She must not get up in the morning ? "

" By no means. I shall probably keep her in bed for a few days ; she must be well nursed. What a pity Miss Anne should be from home just now ! "

For nearly a fortnight Catherine remained in her own room. It was difficult to give her illness a name, but Dr. Rayner said to his wife, who was one of Catherine's best friends, " The truth is, she has regularly broken down ; nerves are unstrung, tone is lowered, the liver is out of order, the action of the heart is weak, altogether there is a want of power such as I have rarely known, except in cases of actual disease."

" Do you think parting with her daughter has brought things to a crisis with her ? " asked Mrs. Rayner.

" I am quite sure it has. I have been hearing all about it, from the servants, and from Wreford himself ; he is very anxious about his wife."

" Well he may be ! It is my belief, though, that he will never know her value till he has lost her. Robert Wreford is not the sort of man I should like for *my* husband, and she is a woman of a thousand ! I shall go and see her as soon as you tell me I may."

" You may go this afternoon ; I can trust *you* to be prudent. The poor thing wants a friend—a woman-

friend ; kind hearted and sympathetic, like my little wife. She has been too much thrown back upon herself, I can see that ! She is one of those whose inner life, unshared, is too intense. She asked me if she had not suppression of *something*, and I told her—*yes !* But I did not say it was suppression of her very self—as it really is ! Go you to her, Ada ; a little *judicious* sympathy will do her more good than my medicines."

And Ada went, and went again and again, and Catherine slowly "recovered tone," as the doctors say. Robert was very kind ; he came home early every evening, and sat with her, and talked and read to her ; he had not shown so much affection for many a year. If Catherine had lost her child, she had found her husband—for a little while, at least ; and she was almost happy, spite of Anne's absence, being coaxed and petted and made much of—and above all—not being snubbed ! It takes so little, sometimes, to make a truly loving woman happy, that it seems a thousand pities she should not have that little, which costs almost nothing and stands for so much with the grateful recipient. How much pure happiness people miss—nay, actually fling away, and never know it, till the dark day comes when they would give worlds to recall the past—which may never, no, never, come back again, though wild the longing and anguished the repentance. Shall we not be tender and gentle and unselfish with our loved ones while we have them with us?—in good old Bible language, "while it is called to-day" ?

CHAPTER XV.

CHANGES BELOW-STAIRS.

CATHERINE gradually recovered, inasmuch as she resumed her usual habits, came down to breakfast, attended to her ordinary domestic duties, went to church regularly, and

sometimes made calls upon necessity with a due acknowledgment of the claims of society. What these "claims" were she was never quite certain; but she did her best to carry out her husband's injunctions, and for the first time in her life invested in regulation visiting-cards, and figured on paste-board as Mrs. Robert Wreford, of Ivy-side. But though busy again, as usual, and always declaring that she was quite well, there was something about her which told observant friends that she had by no means regained her normal health. She was not strong—that is to say, she was easily tired; she had frequent headaches, and the servants told each other that missis didn't eat enough to keep up her strength. She had quite lost her appetite since Miss Anne went away to foreign parts.

Gradually, too, there were changes in the household—the changes to which Robert had referred, when giving his daughter a little paternal advice on the eve of her departure. One day, early in April, Mr. Wreford, who had returned home rather before the usual time, began to speak of a little supper-party which they had had the night before. "Only quite a friendly gathering," it had been called; but the visitors went away fully persuaded that the Wrefords were intending to come out of their shell, and make something of a figure in the circle wherein they revolved. The party—there had been tea at seven, and supper shortly before ten—had gone off very well, and Mrs. Wreford had worn the new silk dress with *real* lace that Mr. Wreford brought with him from Paris.

Yes, "it all went off very well," was the general comment next day; and Mrs. Wreford looked *sweetly* in that Paris-made pearl-grey, and that lovely Mechlin and pale pink; and she really was prettier than ever, now that she had lost the bloom that some envious matrons had spoken of as "rather *too* pronounced; *almost* like rouge-tint." But Robert was not satisfied with the style in which this mild dissipation, which he intended to be initiatory, had been carried out. Robert detested mediocrity, and he had a future before him of which Catherine did not even dream. Her own idea was that, their income being considerably increased, they might spend more money; and if

Robert liked small festivities, and if she were quite well again, and if Anne were at home, she thought she should not herself dislike them. It was certainly her duty to make her little parties as agreeable as possible. To what extent their income was augmented Catherine was profoundly ignorant, and to make any sort of inquiry on this subject never once occurred to her. She was a wife of the old-fashioned, submissive sort; and besides, she was, though she would not have owned it even to herself, very much in awe of her strong-minded, capable, and prosperous lord and master.

"Catherine," began Robert, that evening, "what made you go away last night, just as Mrs. Cornish and Miss Lee were commencing that beautiful Italian duet?"

"I don't understand Italian. But that was not it. I went away to see to the cutlets."

"You don't mean to say you went into the kitchen? You don't mean that you went and messed with the cooking? and in *that* dress, too?"

"I put on a clean cooking-apron, and I pinned my skirts up, and threw something over my shoulders; I knew my dress was safe. And I could not leave those cutlets to cook; she does not understand them. I had previously discovered that she had no notion of anything beyond common veal-cutlets, and I was sure there would be a mess again, like there was when we had Mr. St. Aubyn to luncheon. Don't you remember how greasy and how flavourless those cutlets were, and how badly shaped?"

"I do, indeed! Our guest must have taken them for skinny, abortive mutton-chops. But that decides the matter. We must have a cook who can be trusted to send up an excellent dinner, an elegant supper, or a nice little luncheon without your interference. An entertainment of any kind must be a failure and a blunder, if any sort of effort be apparent. And nothing can be in worse form than for the lady of the house to slip away from her company to give surreptitious assistance to the kitchen. We must at once secure a cook who understands not only cutlets, but everything else. Why! the woman we have now would not know *truffles* if she saw them! and she

could no more make a *soufflé* than a steam-engine, and she thinks *white sauce* means melted butter!"

"She is a very good plain cook, and she is honest."

"No doubt; but we require something beyond a good plain, honest cook. You had better look out for a *professed* cook, without delay. We shall be giving dinner-parties soon, and we shall want a really-skilled person in the kitchen—one who knows all about *entrées* and French dishes, and the proper sauces and garnishes. This woman is capable of sending a turbot to table wrong side upwards, or of serving up game and poultry without bread-sauce!"

"I dare say she is, because we so seldom have either game or turbot. And I generally look after the bread-sauce myself. There is no more delicate sauce if it is perfectly made, and there is nothing nastier, if it resembles flavoured poultice."

"Exactly. But, Catherine, don't you comprehend that I very much object to your 'looking after' bread-sauce, or any kind of cookery yourself? I wish my wife to be a lady."

"Can I not be a lady, and give a little superintendence in the kitchen?"

"That is a question into which it is unnecessary to enter. It was all very well for you to be clever and active in the culinary department when we could not afford to keep efficient servants—now the case is altogether different; we can pay the best wages, and we ought to be able to secure the very best attendance. So you had better see about a new cook without delay, and at the same time engage a capable, experienced parlour-maid, who has been accustomed to wait at good tables, and who knows what is what!"

"I thought Jane managed very nicely last night; of course, I gave her a few instructions."

"My dear Catherine, you cannot teach what you do not know yourself. You have no idea of the proper service required; you must study the etiquette of entertainments. Perfectly-trained, efficient servants, however, will save you all trouble and anxiety. As to Jane, you might keep her on as housemaid; two servants are not enough.

Who is to answer the door if Jane, single-handed, is as black as a sweep, cleaning the grates, or scrubbing down the kitchen stairs?"

"Jane never is as black as a sweep. She has a most cleanly fashion of doing even her dirty work; but on very busy days I often answer the door myself."

"Then I beg, I desire, I command you never again to forget yourself so far. Who ever heard of a *lady* answering the door-bell?"

"Robert, I don't understand. I have been making myself as useful as I could all my life—especially all my married life—and you always, till quite lately, applauded me for so doing, and even impressed upon me the necessity of industry and economy."

"Industry and economy have relative meanings. I still wish you to be industrious, but in another direction. You may still be economical, inasmuch as you may prevent waste. If I had a million a-year, needless waste would make me wretched; but you are justified now in spending *all* the money I give you. Spend it judiciously, and I shall be well satisfied."

"How much may I, ought I, to spend?"

Now we will not record Robert's reply, lest any of our lady readers should cavil at the amount of "house-money" Catherine was to receive; some, perhaps, thinking it too large a sum, some laughing at its insufficiency. It is enough to say that Mr. Wreford named a figure that took away his wife's breath; it was considerably more than what, a year ago, she had believed their whole annual income to be. She felt frightened at the bare idea of spending so much money, and she exclaimed: "Oh, Robert! we can never afford it!"

"I am the best judge of that," he replied drily; "I know what I am making per annum—you do not."

"But ought I not to know, Robert? I think a wife should know her husband's concerns?"

"And I think not. Of course, if a man is a mere clerk, with a pitiful fixed stipend, his wife must know it, and ought, perhaps, to know it, that she may accustom herself to cut her coat according to her cloth. But, beyond that, such knowledge is neither requisite nor expedient. My

dear, no wife really knows her husband's concerns—that is if he has any worth the name; she may think she does, but she does not, nor is it necessary that she should. When she is told how much she may spend, she ought to be content, and glad to be free from further responsibilities."

"Robert, I am afraid I was never born to be the wife of a rich man!"

"I hope you were! Indeed, I am sure you were, since you really are my lawful wife, and must continue such as long as your life lasts. But whether you are *fitted* to be what you are, and will be, is quite another thing."

"It is too late to turn me into a fashionable lady; I am too old!"

"You need not remind me of that! And women grow old and stereotyped so soon, so much earlier than men. Now, at forty-five, I feel quite young and vigorous, and I seem to see my life before me, more than ever! You appear to have come to a stand-still. It is not enough that a man's wife should be only one year his junior. You ought not to be a day more than thirty-five. Why, you will be *fifty*, very shortly."

"And so will you, Robert. And when all is said and done, you will keep your jubilee before I keep mine—if I live so long, that is."

"That is quite another matter. A man at fifty is just in his prime; a woman is—well, we won't say what she is, but the sear and yellow leaf is not far off. A woman of fifty should be married to a man of sixty. Unless it be so, the man is dissatisfied, and the woman is jealous and exacting; no, you need not flush up in that way; I do not mean as regards other women—I am referring only to the ordinary course of life. I mean simply that a man at fifty has possibilities before him which a woman of the same age has not; and the woman, unless she be singularly strong-minded and rational, naturally resents the being left behind, and in nineteen cases out of twenty turns prematurely crabbed, sour, and jealous—not, as I remarked, of other women necessarily, but of everything which claims her husband's attention, and diverts it from herself."

"I don't agree with you," was all that Catherine could say. She could not trust herself to reply; neither, indeed, could she put into words the thoughts that filled her bosom: it might have been better for her if she could. She turned away, hopeless of ever coming to an understanding with her husband; dimly and sadly she began to perceive that they had been very gradually drifting apart ever since their marriage, if not before. In the first halcyon days of their engagement all was as it should be: Robert was wrapped up in her; she was intermingled with his dearest hopes; life without her would be no life to him. Then, slowly, slowly—oh! so very slowly—rose on the horizon the cloud no bigger than a man's hand. Years passed on, and they still "kept company," and Robert never so much as looked favourably at any other girl; but people—those tiresome people who always consider everybody's business but their own—began to say that Robert Wreford's prudence exceeded his affection, and there were a few who declared positively that the long engagement would come to nothing, that the two so long betrothed would never become man and wife.

But these croakers, as we know, were wrong. And—we must do Robert justice—it would have been a great trouble to him had anything occurred to prevent the marriage which was so long delayed. Like other young men, he had his temptations, but his thoughts never once wandered from the one to whom he had pledged his word. Prettier girls, well-connected girls, and, most seductive of all to a man of his temperament, girls with money, came in his way; but he never saw one to whom the humble, portionless Catherine was not preferred. At last came the wedding, and the two, so long plighted, were one for evermore—one by the law of God, as of man. And then, being always together, and being, as it were, linked inseparably in the path they were to tread—then it was that Catherine first began to comprehend that her husband had a life of his own, in which she had no part. She went with him so far and no farther; if she tried to go beyond this invisible barrier, something, she knew not what, invariably repelled her. As time passed on the barrier became more defined; the little brooklet that at

first divided them became a broad, deep stream. On the one side walked Robert, serene, unperturbed, steadfast in his aims; on the other, Catherine, restless, fearful, and wondering *why* she could not cross to him, and be close to him, as in the happy past.

“ A little pain when the beck grows wider,
‘ Cross to me now—for her wavelets swell;’
‘ I may not cross’—and the voice beside her
Faintly reacheth, though heeded well.

“ No backward path—ah! no returning;
No second crossing that ripple’s flow;
‘ Come to me now, for the west is burning;
Come, ere it darkens’—‘ Ah, no! ah, no! ’

“ Then cries of pain, and arms outreaching,
The beck grows wider, and swift, and deep;
Passionate words as of one beseeching—
The loud beck drowns them, we walk and weep.”

But the weeping and the outstretched arms were on one side; the pain was all Catherine’s. Robert was perfectly satisfied, nor did he even for a moment imagine that he was not all to her that any reasonable woman could desire. And perhaps Catherine was not quite reasonable, since she had deliberately allied herself with one of such diverse character. She was always content with what came to her. To be able to maintain a respectable position, to have enough for all her wants and for some few simple luxuries, and to leave her children, if she had any, in better circumstances than her own in youth, had comprised the extent of her worldly longings. And Robert had been ambitious from a child, and he had determined to die a millionaire, supposing he lived to a good age, when a million, or even a quarter of a million, seemed to be as unattainable as the treasures of another planet. To be a rich man, and to hold a foremost position in society, was always his goal; and at five-and-twenty his present circumstances would have appeared to him as satisfactory and all-sufficient. But twenty-five and forty-five are widely different in their estimate of things. And no passion grows with what it feeds on like ambition and lust of filthy lucre.

So now it came to pass that Robert and Catherine, after

almost sixteen years of marriage, without any obvious cause of division, and without aught between them to which the most censorious observer could take exception, had little in common, and quietly, imperceptibly, were drifting further apart as the days went on. Especially had this been the case since Robert had become master of the business in Fenchurch Street ; and now the new mode of life which she was expected to adopt not only astonished, but confounded her. She was to be a grand lady, and she had not, as she told herself, with many tears and nervous tremblings, the making of a grand lady in her. And, worse still, she did not know, nor could she discover, what was required of her in this novel capacity.

She could, however, obey commands, and carry out, to the best of her ability, the orders she received, though how to secure the sort of cook her husband demanded she could not tell. She resolved to do her utmost, and trust to the chapter of accidents for the rest. And accident—or rather, we should say, Providence—brought her an unexpected ally in the person of Philip Rutland, who called upon her one morning, having just returned from Paris, with a message and a little parcel from Miss Wreford.

Mr. Rutland thought that Anne's mother was one of the sweetest-looking women he had ever seen, only she seemed sadly out of health. And he said to himself as he sat opposite to her, after telling her all the latest news of the *Pension de la Tour*—“She must have been lovely in her bloom ; her daughter will never have half her beauty.” As they talked, they became confidential, and it somehow came to pass that the subject of servants turned up incidentally ; and Catherine, like a timid swimmer out of his depth—ready to catch at any straw that might set her on her feet again—mentioned that she was in despair of obtaining a thoroughly good cook.

“I think I can help you to what you want,” said he. “Mrs. Markham, my aunt, could recommend you the very person you require, I am tolerably certain.”

“If she would I should be everlastingly obliged.”

“I suppose wages are not an object ?”

“Not at all,” replied Catherine promptly ; for Robert had told her that if she could find the article she needed,

she was not, on any account, to stick out for price. At the same time, it seemed very odd and quite unnatural to say such a thing; to pledge herself to give any wages that were asked, when her present cook had only ten pounds a year ("all found"), and Jane but nine pounds. She felt as if she were something of an impostor, but Mr. Rutland seemed to think it nothing out of the way. He knew Mrs. Markham had just such a person in her eye—a woman who could do anything—send up a dinner of twelve courses, broil a chop, and even boil a potato admirably.

"And did Anne seem quite content—quite happy?" asked Catherine, for the second time, returning again to her *moutons*.

"Quite, I think. And she was looking very well. I was to say that she had grown nearly an inch since leaving England, and that her new silk dress was obliged to be let down. She was much pleased with Nellie. You know I went to take my youngest sister to school. Miss Wreford was actually the only English pupil till Nellie arrived, though there were half-a-dozen Americans. But, of course, you know all about that; Miss Wreford confided to me the fact that she wrote home at great length, and as often as rules permitted."

"Yes; I seem to know the place quite well. Anne gives me every detail of her life and its surroundings; she knows that any trifle that concerns her interests me. Some things seem odd enough to my English notions, but, on the whole, I think the child is comfortable, and likes the change. Madame is strict, but kind, she says, and the girls who obey rules and do their work well have nothing to fear from her. I am so glad, though, she has an English girl for a companion. She did not take heartily to the American young ladies, she wrote me word; she preferred the French even. How old is your sister, Mr. Rutland?"

"She is in her fifteenth year, but she is not as tall as Miss Wreford. I think I may say, without partiality, that she is as sweet and good a girl as you will find in any country, though I suppose I am not exactly the person to say so."

"I do not see why brothers and sisters should not speak well of each other, as freely as those who are no relations."

"Nor I, if you come to that; but society has a certain code, to which one is, more or less, obliged to bend."

"I think society is, more or less, a nuisance."

"Yes, perhaps so," replied the young man, rather surprised at a certain perceptible bitterness in Mrs. Wreford's tone. And he wondered, "I wonder, now, whether Wreford bothers her about the duties she owes to society, and all that sort of thing? I should say he is just the man to stand upon foolish points of etiquette, and I am not sure but that he is a bit of a snob. His wife, however, is a perfect lady."

Mr. Rutland, it must be parenthetically remarked, had been born and brought up in that position towards which Robert was deliberately advancing; he would, therefore, instinctively judge of the true *calibre* of both wife and husband.

He went away, charmed with Catherine, and promising to come and see her frequently; and she, taking sudden courage, actually issued an impromptu invitation on her own account, and asked him to spend an evening at Ivy-side. Rutland at once assented, and inquired if he might bring one of his sisters; and then he praised the garden, just coming into its spring beauty, and took leave of Catherine, who felt her spirits wonderfully raised. It was something to have been face to face with a person who had seen and talked with Anne only three days ago. And he was no common young man; he was so kind and gentle, and treated her with a deferential courtesy, to which she was but little accustomed; and if he would only help her to a cook—a cook, whose superior abilities would enable her to please her master, and meet all his requirements—she thought she must be his debtor for life.

Philip Rutland was as good as his word. He spoke to his aunt, who was one of those ladies who seemed to have missed their vocation, inasmuch as they do not keep a register-office, and who always have a number of *protégées* on hand, and take it in good part when their friends rely upon them to fill up a domestic *hiatus*.

"Know of a good cook?" quoth the excellent matron, when her nephew put the question. "I know of two, both perfect treasures. Our friends the Dashleighs are going on the Continent for two years, as you know, and all their servants have notice. I'll run across to Mrs. Dashleigh this very evening, Philip. It is a *thorough* cook that is wanted, of course?"

"Oh, of course. Why should anybody want, or even tolerate, anything else?"

"Why, indeed! When you marry, Philip, let me choose your servants."

"With all my heart, auntie; then I shall be sure of good ones, and Mrs. Philip Rutland will be saved an infinitude of trouble."

"Ah, when shall we see Mrs. Philip Rutland? Really, Philip, at your age, and with your prospects, you *ought* to marry. And such charming girls as you know! And I am sure I don't know one who would refuse you."

"That is more than you can say, and more than you ought to say, auntie. It is not your fault that I am not the most conceited, insufferable puppy in all Bayswater. At any rate, I have not yet seen 'the happy she' with whom I should choose to go for the rest of my natural life in double harness. I don't think the young ladies of the present day are as nice as their mammas."

"Fie! fie! I refuse to listen to anything so ungallant. I know many sweet girls. I could find you the perfection of a wife to-morrow."

"Thank you, my dear aunt; but a wife is an article I should prefer to choose for myself. And there is no such great hurry. Why, I am only four-and-twenty next birthday! In two or three years more I shall begin to know what sort of woman I want; at present, I am bound to confess, I don't. I am content to beau my sisters and you."

"Well, wilful folk must have their way; and, after all, it is better than entangling yourself at eighteen, and repenting it at twenty-one, as my poor boy did. Oh, dear! oh, dear! when I think how Arthur has thrown himself away! Regularly angled for and caught by a designing woman! Oh, take care, Philip! those who think they are invulnerable get badly wounded at last."

"I must be very hard hit before I own myself wounded at all. But you will see about a cook for Mrs. Wreford, will you not? I feel myself quite pledged, and I am to drink tea with her next Tuesday, and Agnes must go with me."

"Pray, has Mrs. Wreford any daughters?" asked Mrs. Markham, suspiciously.

"Only one. And it was for the sake of the daughter I made the mother's acquaintance," added Philip, mischievously.

"Ah!—indeed!"

"A fact, I assure you. Miss Wreford is in Paris, and I went to see her when I took Nellie to school."

"What is she doing in Paris?"

"She, also, is at school, at Madame de la Tour's."

"A raw girl in her teens! a bread-and-butter miss in white muslin and blue ribbons! And mark my words, Philip Rutland, I am an old woman, and I know the world, and I caution you that white muslin and innocence don't necessarily go together."

"I suppose not; I never thought they did. In this case, however, I should say they do. Only I have not yet had the pleasure of seeing Miss Wreford in white muslin. My dear aunt, do not look so fidgety; I am only plaguing you, as a dutiful nephew should. Anne Wreford is twelve years old; or, as she puts it, she is 'going in thirteen.' And I began my acquaintance with her rather adversely, for when I first saw her, she had cried till she was in a state of *soak* at parting with her mother. And her father did not look after her too carefully, so I took compassion on the poor child, and tried to cheer her up a bit. I found her singularly intelligent, and very well behaved, and there was something about her that quite won my heart—she was evidently so truthful and so confiding. She is almost ugly now—thin and sallow, and all legs and arms; but she will make a fine woman one of these days. Those scraggy, dark-complexioned girls often turn out handsome; but she will never rival her mother."

"What is she like?"

"Like the picture of a true, good, sweet wife and

mother. She has the remains of a beautiful complexion ; her face is a perfect oval, and her hair is glossy and abundant, and of a rich, full brown. I should think Wreford is very proud of her ; she is a woman who would grace any circle. Only I am afraid she is in poor health, and there is a sorrowful, patient look in her eyes, that tells of some kind of unhappiness. I believe it was a great trial to her parting with her only child. I want you and the girls to know her ; I am sure you would suit."

" Hackney is at the other end of the world."

" Nevertheless, it is not difficult of access. We might drive there, and put up the carriage for an hour ; or we might take the train. The Wrefords' are not five minutes from the station."

" What makes them live at that side of London ? "

" Proximity to business, I should imagine. Mr. Wreford's place is in Fenchurch Street. The train all but sets him down at his own door at either end of the journey. And really, aunt, those Hackney and Clapton and Stamford Hill people have the advantage of us in a hundred ways. The Wrefords' house is twice as large as ours, and I dare say they pay a third of our rent. Then they have garden enough for fifty Tyburnian residences. I am not sure but that we sacrifice too much to the Moloch of fashion, by crowding ourselves up at this end of the town. When I set up housekeeping for myself, it will not be in Westbournia nor in Belgravia. I have no idea of paying three or four hundred a-year, or probably more, for an architectural bandbox, when I can get a roomy, cheerful tenement, with a pleasant garden, for one hundred, if not for less. However, that's neither here nor there, for I am not going to housekeeping while I have you to cater for me at home ; but you *will* see to this cook, will you not ? "

" I promise you that I will. The Dashleighs' cook is equal to any *chef*. I suppose there is no question as to wages ? "

" I believe not. Mrs. Wreford seemed quite prepared to give liberal wages."

" How many servants does she keep ? "

"I really don't know."

"Because I am pretty sure that woman—the Dashleighs' cook—would not go anywhere, unless there was a regular establishment. And she does not think £30 a-year and perquisites enough. She means to 'better herself ;' she told me so."

"I hope she is honest ?"

"Oh, yes, I think so—that is, honest as cooks count honesty. She may have peculiar notions as to perquisites—most cooks have. You know, I have never allowed *perquisites* since I caught that young man carrying away the spoil after dark in a large hamper. But Mrs. Wreford must look after herself."

Poor Catherine! if she had but known what dreadful worries were in store for her, I think she would have prayed Robert on her bended knees to let her keep cook and Jane alone—cook, who didn't know *truffles* when she saw them, and whose cutlets were apt to be deformed and greasy ; and Jane, who now and then *did* hand vegetables on the right hand instead of on the left, and go out of the room when everybody was served, instead of standing like a dummy against the sideboard ! But both were honest and faithful, and would have done anything for the "missis" *short* of stopping in on the Sunday evening, renouncing crinolines—then all the rage—and giving up their respective "young men," who were permitted to call for them at Ivyside.

CHAPTER XVI.

NOT STRONG ENOUGH FOR THE PLACE.

IN process of time the Dashleighs' cook was transferred to Ivyside, where she became a thorn in the flesh to her mistress, whose directions she, as a rule, silently and

politely ignored. But she sent up unexceptionable dinners, could toss up a nice hot luncheon, or a little supper, at an hour's notice, and had evidently studied "*garnish*" as one of the fine arts. The worst of it was, she was always wanting to try her skill upon something; plain roast and boiled, with the proper sauce and gravy, was all very well, she averred, but it was the soups and *entrées* that kept her hand in, and exercised her capacity, which else would rust in no time. And Robert was delighted; it was exactly what he wanted, though he did shrug his broad shoulders a little when he heard the wages she demanded, and he gravely reproved his wife, who had taken him at his word, and made no effort to cheapen the services of the audacious woman. But the wages were but as a sop to Cerberus, compared with other expenses; the perquisites were something alarming, and the immunities startling, and even these sank into insignificance when the first month's bills came in, and showed an incredible consumption of the best joints, of gravy beef, of sweet-breads, of vegetables and greengrocery generally, not to speak of immense supplies from the provision and Italian warehouses, with butter, eggs, and cream to an unlimited extent.

This cook knew *truffles* when she saw them, and she knew how to use them, too; also morels, mushrooms, glaze, *consommé*, and a host of other culinary concomitants, without which she solemnly declared it was impossible to do justice to her cookery. And as she very much despised the Hackney tradesmen, as mere *Heast-enders*! she insisted on having all her best things in from Fortnum and Mason's. Catherine was aghast when the first settling-day arrived. Robert, when he gave her the first month's money, on the new arrangement, said, impressively, "Now, ma, here is your month's allowance, and it is not to include any of your charities, or private expenses; it is simply housekeeping money, recollect, and you may spend it to the uttermost farthing, but *you must make it do!*"

"No fear of that," said Catherine, complacently. How could she possibly spend more in one month, especially as Robert assured her that the wine-merchant's bills were

entirely his concern, and that she should always have a few pounds extra whenever they were about to give a grand entertainment? Under the old *régime* it would have been absolutely impossible to get rid of so much money in so short a time, unless she literally made ducks and drakes of it! The difficulty would be, she thought, to spend it all legitimately; and she wondered whether it would be wrong to put by just a few pounds that really were not wanted for any sudden exigency. Also, her conscience began to be burdened, and she questioned greatly whether, as Christian people, they were justified in squandering so much in useless luxury and show when so many poor creatures wanted necessary food. She felt this so much that she timidly named it to her husband, who replied, "It is a Christian's duty, Catherine, to live according to his position, and you might have trusted me to strike a just balance between our charities and our expenditure. I have increased *all* our subscriptions—of course, I shall pay yours for you; I have given handsome donations to several of our foremost societies, and my name is down for no insignificant sum in more than one benevolent report. Again, I say, you might have trusted me!"

What would Mr. Wreford have thought had some too faithful friend told him that he was actually making a compromise with the God whom he professed to serve? that, in effect, though not in words, he was saying to the Almighty, "I give so much, O Lord, to Thy cause, that Thou canst not take it amiss of me if I spend a larger sum upon myself. I know that money given to Thy poor is lent to Thee, and thou blessest the generous giver, and makest his oil and wine and corn, which is to say his merchandise, to increase greatly, and his wealth to multiply. Therefore, as I put into Thy treasury, Lord, do Thou recompense me again; what I give to Thee do Thou give back again, with compound interest, and Thy blessing on my immortal soul into the bargain?"

I do not mean that Robert ever spoke in this profane fashion to the Lord; but if his sentiments had been reduced to speech, I think this is pretty nearly what he would have uttered. Poor Robert! it never occurred to him that his

liberal subscriptions were not paid into the Lord's treasury. He little knew that the poor woman, who came twice a week to his house to do odd jobs which were too menial for his fine new domestics, gave fifty times more than he when she paid in her quarterly sixpences as "A Widow's Mite" to the City Mission or the Bible Society; sixpences which she saved out of her scanty earnings, by going without sugar—only coarse sugar—in her tea, and sometimes without milk! The hoarded sixpences were the Lord's, no doubt, and He put them into His treasury as fine gold; while Robert's shining sovereigns were never added to his credit at all, because as they passed out of his hands, they turned like fairy tokens into dead leaves and worthless pebbles, though men gathered them up as good coin of the realm. In brief, Robert paid *taxes* to God lest he should be distressed as a defaulter; the poor charwoman gave freely with a loving and thankful heart.

So he felt that he had a right to chide Catherine when she had the temerity to remind him of his *duties*, and he felt perfectly satisfied as he remembered how that very day he had put down his name for handsome subscriptions to the *London Missionary*, the *Colonial*, and the *Home Missionary* Societies, and the world would see that he was not in the least inclined to shirk his responsibilities as a Christian City merchant. From that day to the day of his death, I am afraid Robert Wreford, Esq., never gave anything which did not appear in black and white. As for Catherine, she could never feel that the subscriptions which appeared in her name were hers at all; she never counted them even when she took an introspective view of herself and of the good works which ought to be the outcome of every Christian's faith; and as she was to have an allowance of her own, for dress and pocket-money, she solemnly resolved to dedicate a certain amount, chiefly to obscure charities, and that without letting her right hand know what her left hand scattered. Robert gave her *that* money for her own use, and she could, without any scruple of conscience, spend some of it—not upon herself.

And for the same reason, every married woman ought to have something of her very own, so that she may possess a fund, however small, for charitable and religious

purposes ; so that she may not offer to the Lord that which costs her nothing—an offering which, after all, is only a vain mockery. For if she dips into the house-keeping purse, or, easier still, asks her husband for a cheque, or for the necessary amount in silver and gold, she is paying by proxy the debt which we all owe to our poor brethren, and, through them, to God. She has not, personally, done *what she could*.

But as regarded the too lavish means which were placed in her hands, Catherine need not have disquieted herself. More than once her heart misgave her, as various things were ordered in, regardless of expense, as it seemed to her, and with very little reference to her authority ; and as the month drew to its close, she felt a certain nervous anxiety to audit and settle her accounts, wondering first of all if there would be any residue when all were paid, and presently, if she would have *enough* to meet her liabilities. Already a good deal had melted away in small current expenses ; for, in spite of the talented cook's expressed disapproval, she insisted on paying ready-money for certain things, which hitherto had amounted to so little that a bill seemed a superfluity.

What was her dismay when she found herself actually some pounds in debt. She could not believe the testimony of her own eyes ; she could not trust her own calculations, though she went over them again and again, and always with the same result—always the accounts were in excess of the sum which remained in her purse. Always that sum, though she counted it up at least half-a-dozen times, remained the same. She was thunderstruck, confounded, miserable ! For the first time since she became Catherine Wreford she had got into money difficulties. She could not make both ends meet, and after Robert had been so liberal ! Oh ! what would he say ? She trembled to think how displeased—and how justly displeased—he would be. Again she took up the bills. In the old time they had all lived on less than was charged for the single item of gravy-beef ! They might have been eating sweetbreads and cutlets morning, noon, and night. Nevertheless, they had plenty of substantial joints, nor was there any stint in rump-steaks and mutton chops !

She next contemplated the poult er's accounts—had he really delivered all those chickens and ducklings? and—why, they might have been swimming in cream, and anointing themselves from head to foot with fresh butter, as the Orientals with fine oil. Fortnum and Mason's bill was a puzzle from beginning to end, for she did not know what half the entries meant. And she stared at the cost of the sumptuous *pâté de foie-gras*, which had been so highly recommended, and which cook had ordered without reference to head-quarters for a certain luncheon at which several City magnates had been entertained.

What could she do? Only tell Robert, and declare her penitence. But the worst of it was, that she could perceive no remedy. There was no reason why July should not be as June, and even worse! The reins had somehow slipped out of her hands, and she foresaw that, strive and manage as she might, she would never be more than a puppet-queen, with so determined and extravagant a prime minister. And she did not dare to give her tyrant notice, for "the master" fully appreciated Mrs. Cook's daily *menus*, and was continually congratulating his wife on having found exactly what she wanted. But that night, when poor Catherine very humbly reported herself a defaulter, he was anything but congratulatory, and he told her that she was just like other women—the more she had to do with, the greater were her deficiencies. She must have been ordering all sorts of goods quite recklessly, and there must have been shameful waste, if not cheating, *somewhere!* And Robert looked and spoke as if Catherine herself might have been guilty on both counts.

"But, indeed," she pleaded, "I cannot help it; I never knew that these things or those, this or that, came into the house!"

"Who *should* know, then?" asked Robert, with an air of grave severity, surveying her as a self-convicted culprit.

"How *can* I know, if cook takes upon herself to give orders to the tradesmen? She thinks I have no business in the kitchen; she plainly told me so the other day. She has been accustomed, she says, to submit her bills of fare to the lady of the house every morning, and to receive the

lady's commands, and at the end of the quarter to have all accounts settled, and no unpleasantness nor interference."

"I am afraid the woman is a cheat! Look here; it is preposterous! We never can have used all this cream! And what a lot of out-of-the-way things! Pistachio nuts! Vanilla! Tarragon vinegar! tomato sauce! essence of chives!"

"Nevertheless, they all go to the making up of those delicate *plats*, which you commend so much."

"I am quite sure we can have the same dishes far more cheaply."

"No doubt. But a professed cook like this woman—who, however, esteems herself both honest and economical—will no more do her work *cheaply* than will a West End Court milliner."

"Well! it is mere waste of breath to go on arguing in a circle. I'll draw you a cheque for the exact amount you require, and let everybody be paid out of hand. I hate the sight of 'account delivered,' followed by fresh items. But mind, this is never to occur again."

"Robert dear, it *will* occur again. With that dreadful woman at the head of the commissariat, I am powerless to prevent it."

"What sheer nonsense! Are you not mistress in your own house?"

"Not absolutely; not while cook takes upon herself to make her own arrangements, irrespective of my consent."

"You must speak very seriously to her. I don't want you to soil your hands—I won't have it, indeed—you are to be the lady always, as becomes your position, Mrs. Wreford; but I shall hold you responsible for the expenditure, of course, and if things go wrong in the household, it is *you* who must be blamed, the servants being entirely at your disposal. As for myself, I never interfere in domestic concerns, and I never will—and hitherto, I must say, you have managed admirably; only I am afraid, my dear, that you are better fitted to be the mistress of a small, humble establishment, than to preside over such a household as I am resolved that mine shall be."

"I never was meant for great things, I believe," said

Catherine, sadly. "I never was happier than when we lived in a small house, and kept only one inexperienced little maid to make herself as useful or as troublesome as might be."

"Depend upon it, my dear, 'tis distance lends enchantment to the view,' for you are talking like a goody-goody book. I am quite convinced that you would not like to return to £80 or £100 a year, and, for myself, I flatly declare that I should not! I never despised the inevitable day of small things, but I should have despised myself had they remained 'small' an hour longer than was absolutely imperative. Besides, there is no standing still in the race of life; if one is not climbing the hill Difficulty, one is sure to be sliding down backwards into the valley of penury and humiliation. Those who don't advance must perforce recede. Well! I choose to push forward to the front, lest Dame Fortune should send me to the rear, to find my lot with the dilatory, the unenterprising, the dullards, and the unsuccessful! And you, Catherine—as you happen to be my wife—are bound to proceed with me. If you cannot help me on, don't try to drag me back."

"How can I help you?"

"How? in a thousand ways! And the truth is, if you don't help, I am nonplussed at once. A man *can't* get on without his wife, because it is she who must receive and entertain; she who must form her circle of acquaintances; she who must be the guiding spirit of her household; she who must maintain her husband's dignity and social reputation. But I am afraid—am sadly afraid—you are incompetent. Now, I should like nothing better than for you to have 'an evening,' only I dread lest it should be a failure. And you are so obstinate, Catherine, as well as so dull and passive. Do you think you *could* do it?"

"I would try, if you wished it. Is it something like Mrs. Bartelot's *soirée* that you mean?"

"As much like it as you please. A nice lot of pleasant people—literary, political, &c.; music, conversation, good photographs, with tea and coffee, and biscuits; at the utmost, a few sandwiches, perhaps. And once a fortnight

would be enough, at first. Suppose we say every other Wednesday?"

"But that is service-night."

"Well, there would be the alternate Wednesday for the service. You must look up some really nice young people who play and sing well; you have the Rutlands to begin with, and Fanny Carr and her brother are just the people one wants at such an informal gathering."

"But we have no piano."

"My dear Catherine, you make mountains of molehills. Pianos are to be had for money. I can buy one—the best that is to be had for ready cash, discount off—to-morrow morning, and it will be here by this time to-morrow evening. I never let the grass grow under *my* feet when I have an object in view."

"And you really wish it?"

"Of course I do! I never talk aimlessly. But do you think you can manage it? Because, you know, unless a thing of this sort turns out a thorough success, it is apt to be a very thorough failure. And while 'nothing succeeds like success,' nothing, on the other hand, is so detrimental as defeat."

"I will try. I will talk to Mrs. Rayner and her friend Mrs. Oliver Westwood. They are used to receiving, and Mrs. Rayner will let me into little secrets. But to come back to these wretched bills—just think if I had better not look out for another cook; one who will obey orders?"

"And spoil our dishes, and so disgrace you at the head of your own table. By no means. Don't you know that every failure of the cook, if it be only an underdone joint, or a tureen of *pasty* melted butter, is a reflection, not on the woman downstairs, but on the lady of the house?"

"If it were *only* underdone joints, or ill-made sauces, I would undertake that they never came to *my* table," replied Catherine, a little proudly; "and I would take the blame of all such mishaps upon myself. But, of course, I could not answer for *entrees* and *entremets* that I do not understand, and could not superintend even if I did."

"No one wants you to answer for *them*; but you must answer for your cook. Incompetent cooks prove incompetent mistresses. No woman who knows her duty to

her husband would retain in her service a cook who was not entirely satisfactory, or discharge one, unless driven to it, who served up her dishes faultlessly."

Catherine sighed, and wondered under what circumstances a mistress who knew her duty to her husband might be legitimately justified in dismissing a capable, but ruinously expensive cook. That she must keep her own sharp-voiced, extravagant tyrant seemed inevitable; so she prepared for a regular campaign, in which she was terribly afraid she might be ingloriously worsted. Henceforth nothing must be ordered into the house save by herself, and the supplies of cream and gravy-beef must be limited.

Mrs. Cook listened and remonstrated; then she became impertinent, and talked the usual stereotyped balderdash about "real ladies" and the "best families." But Catherine, though so gentle, had plenty of mental backbone, and she was not to be driven from her entrenchments by mere vulgar verbiage; she persisted in her determination, though dreading each moment that the incomparable creature would give notice; and that astute personage at once appeared to yield, but at the same time arranged her own method of defence.

"Very well, ma'am," she replied, meekly. "Of course, it's my place to submit, which I always did know my own duty. Only please don't blame me if dishes isn't what they did ought to be, and if the master grumbles; one can't build a fine house when one's stinted in bricks and mortar, you know, ma'am."

"I will take care you are not stinted in any necessary ingredients; you shall have all that is requisite, but nothing to waste," replied Catherine, shortly. She had no mind to enter into a discussion with the paragon. And she fondly hoped that she had made a good fight and won the day, and she felt repaid for the effort, though she trembled all over, and was obliged to take a glass of wine and lie down when the encounter was fairly over.

Alas! her troubles were only beginning. Cook knew how to take her revenge. She said nothing more, but she sent up watery, savourless soups and thin gravies; her

entrées were no longer miracles of art, her patties were ordinary productions; and when remonstrated with, she only replied, quite humbly, "I know they ain't what they should be, but they is not my own *recipes*; I can't work my own way unless I gives my own orders. I must have everything about me what is wanted and what isn't wanted; that I may lay my hand on it the moment it comes into my head. Leave me alone, and I'll cook for the Queen and all the Royal Family; interfere, and tie me down, and allowance me in my ingredients and flavourings, and I ain't fit to serve a tradesman's table; and I knows it."

At the end of the month Catherine found that she had plenty of money wherewith to pay her bills; but she had suffered so much in the interim that she could scarcely congratulate herself.

Robert had quickly grumbled, when he perceived the change, and scarcely a day had passed in which some complaint had not to be made. But the depths of mortification for both were reserved for the day of their grand dinner-party, when nearly every dish and every sauce was more or less a failure. Mr. Wreford spoke to the cook himself, in spite of his policy of non-interference, and her answer was, "I know it, sir, no one knows it better, and I is cut to the very heart. But it ain't my fault; I never can do well if I am hampered, or anyways *limited*! Let me give my own orders, and have in what I pleases, and I'll lay down my life if I don't give satisfaction, and if your visitors don't take me for a *chef*—which I have been taken for by them as wasn't aware of my sect before now, sir."

The end of it was that cook had her way. Henceforth there was no question of making the monthly allowance pay all the bills. Robert simply drew certain cheques, which corresponded with the total of certain accounts, and the tradesmen obsequiously received them, and sent them back the receipts "*with thanks*." But he always blamed Catherine, and told her that things might be different if she only knew how to go about it. And one day he sneeringly remarked, "The fact is, you are not strong enough for the place."

"No, I am not," replied Catherine, quietly—so quietly that Robert looked surprised, as if he would question her meaning, but he did not. Of course, the artistic cook required an aide-de-camp. She must have been rather a *smart* person, for she once said that while she devoted herself to her culinary duties, it was not to be expected of her that she could waste her precious time and skill in *sculler*-inary matters, which any ignorant girl, with hands and arms, could attend to; so a kitchen-maid was duly engaged. Mrs. Rayner found an admirable parlour-maid, who really proved a valuable servant, and Jane, to her mistress's great content, remained to do the general house-work. These four women, and a boy in buttons, yclept "the page," who broke everything he touched, and had a twist in his character, which led him to tell the most monstrous falsehoods, made up the domestic staff at Ivyside. And in due time all arrangements were made for Catherine's first "evening."

"To think that Mrs. Wreford should ever come to have an '*at home*,' like a fashionable worldly lady!" said one of the deacon's wives, who viewed with deep concern the changes which were being wrought in the household of those erst respected and exemplary church-members, Mr. and Mrs. Wreford.

CHAPTER XVII.

"RICH AND RARE WERE THE GEMS SHE WORE."

AND in due time Catherine's first "*at home*" took place, and was on all hands allowed to be a success; and after a while it became an institution, it being generally understood that Mr. and Mrs. Wreford received on every alternate Wednesday evening. Meanwhile Anne remained at school. It was a terrible disappointment to both mother

and daughter when the fiat went forth that the latter was to spend her holidays in Paris. As to Anne's annoyance, it did not much matter, as she was not in a position to remonstrate or declaim; but Robert rather dreaded telling his wife his intentions on this head, and the letter to Madame de la Tour was actually despatched before he took courage to speak to her on the subject. He might not have spoken then, not till it became absolutely imperative, if Catherine had not said to him one day, "I have been getting the child's room ready; she will be here in a fortnight. There will be no difficulty as to her journey, for one of the governesses is going to spend her vacation in London. Nellie Rutland remains in Paris; she has friends there, you know; besides, she has not long been at school."

And then Robert spoke. I am glad to say he did feel a slight and momentary compunction for the pain he was about to inflict; he knew well enough how much Catherine was counting upon the weeks she expected to spend with her daughter, and for the minute he actually wished he had not interfered; but he replied, "Did I not mention to you that I had arranged with Madame de la Tour that Anne should spend her vacations at school?"

"Anne spend her vacations at school?" was Catherine's trembling rejoinder; she was so astonished that she could not take in the bewildering, miserable fact all at once; so terrible a contingency had not even crossed her mind.

"I believe I spoke plainly, my dear," was Robert's reply. "I wish you would not repeat my words—it is a foolish and vulgar habit you have fallen into; I must request that you will break yourself of it as soon as possible."

"But, Robert!" pleaded poor Catherine, little heeding the reproof, "you cannot *mean* it? You will not disappoint me so bitterly?"

"Am I in the habit of talking nonsense? Did you ever know me to say one thing and mean another?"

Catherine sickened; his tone convinced her that he really was in earnest; she began to comprehend that all her pleasant hopes and sweet anticipations had been in vain. Anne would not set foot in England that autumn,

probably not that year. All the nice little plans she had made, all her arrangements for Anne's especial benefit, must come to naught. Why, she had that very morning measured off the new muslin and lace for Anne's toilet-table! Anne's room was to be a bower of innocent luxury and simple beauty when she returned to it, and now!—now!—oh, could it be true that the child was not to enter it for no one knew how many months? "Why did you not tell me sooner?" she faltered; she knew that reproaches and entreaties would be alike in vain.

"Well, really, I did not think of it," answered he, telling as complete a falsehood as ever in his life he had told; the truth being that he had thought of little else for several weeks past, when at home at Ivyside with no company but his wife. "And as it vexes you, I am glad I left it till the last moment. I do wish, my dear, you would not set yourself so systematically to oppose, or at least to question, the expediency of all my plans. There is always unhappiness when husband and wife do not fully co-operate."

"I suppose so," she answered, gravely. "But you might tell me your reasons for this arrangement."

"I should have thought they were patent to any person of common sense. I think it is undesirable that Anne should be so soon unsettled; also that the double journey would be an unnecessary expense."

"Expense! oh, Robert! And we are spending so much just now. And, of course, Madame de la Tour will require extra payment for the vacation."

"Of course! that is all settled. I have made every arrangement, and I have sent the girl a little extra pocket-money, that she may enjoy herself with her companions."

"And when *will* she come home? When *may* I depend on seeing my child again?"

"I do not intend that she shall return home till her two years in Paris have expired; but if you will only be reasonable, and not worry me with foolish complaints, I will take you over to see her; I should not mind going on the Continent next month instead of to the sea-side. What do you say?"

"I cannot fancy myself out of England—I, who have

scarcely been out of London ; but if there is no other way, if you are determined to keep Anne away from her home, I will go to her willingly. I am rather afraid of the sea, but I would undertake a voyage to Australia to have my child in my arms again."

"Now you are giving way to that ridiculous hysteria ; there are tears in your voice ! If you are going to make a scene, I will go."

And suiting the action to the word, Robert went, leaving Catherine to struggle with the nervous affection which often troubled her now. Perhaps it was the best thing he could do, for his ministrations, mingled with rebuke, were more likely to increase than to allay the malady. And yet, a few warm, tender words would have had a wonderful effect, for Catherine's "attacks" were of the mildest ; they were merely of hysterical nature, inasmuch as she could control neither tears nor sobs ; but they were not pure *hysteria*, and they never developed into those shrill, unnatural cries and convulsive writhings which, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, are the result of temper or of excitement, which might, at the outset, be controlled with very little effort. Catherine was sensible of her weakness, and knowing her husband's masculine objection to tears, strove against them, but in vain ; she could no longer command herself as in days past.

All that now remained to her was to put away out of sight everything which was specially prepared, or in process of preparation, for her child's delectation during the holidays. With a heavy heart, and with nervous, trembling fingers, she folded the fresh muslin and the new chintz, and laid it aside ; the little Parian vases, bought only yesterday, she wrapped in silver paper, and consigned to a drawer rarely opened ; while the flowering plants, already ranged on the window-sill of Anne's room, were carried down again into the garden ; and then she folded her hands, and wearily resigned herself to the inevitable, knowing as well as if an angel from heaven had proclaimed it, that it was simply waste of breath and effort to fight against the laws of the Medes and Persians, which may never be revoked ! Robert, while the mood lasted,

invested himself with all the attributes of infallibility, and delivered his encyclicals as if he were either the Pope himself or an old maid crazed with the delusion that she has a divine mission to set the whole world right!

"My dear, what is the matter with you?" asked Mrs. Markham, nearly a fortnight afterwards, on the last of Catherine's reception nights.

In spite of the season being well over, and "all London" out of town, the Ivyside rooms were tolerably filled.

"Oh, nothing is the matter—that is to say, nothing much," replied Catherine, turning one of her brightest smiles on Mrs. Markham. "Do I look—well! say *seedy*? Why do you ask?"

"You look as if we all bored you dreadfully."

"Oh, dear!" said Catherine, quite shocked; "how badly I must have been behaving myself! But I am afraid I am incorrigibly ill-bred."

"My dear Mrs. Wreford, I meant nothing of the kind. Perhaps instead of 'bored' I ought to have said *tired*."

"I am very tired—tired almost to death, I think. I thought, only this morning, how much stronger I was this time last year; I have felt lately that it would be a downright comfort to breakfast always in bed."

"Why not do so?"

"It is such an idle habit for the mistress of the house to indulge in. And then, I am sure Robert would not like it. Men want looking after in the morning, you know, and they require a nice, substantial breakfast before going to business."

"Quite so; but that cook you have ought to be capable of sending up any kind of breakfast you may order. The Dashleighs said she was unusually clever and successful with her breakfast relishes."

"So she is; but Robert would not care to pour out his own tea, or help himself to every sort of dish."

"I understand! Yes; men, unless at a bachelor party, always do want women at table, partly to serve them, partly to amuse them: in some cases to act as safety-valves, when their tempers are getting to boiling point, or their milk of human kindness turned to curds and

whey. You see, as a rule, a man cannot scold anybody in the world so satisfactorily, or with such utter impunity, as his wife. And when he has had his fling at her, he can go out among his equals and dependents with an amiable countenance, and society never even suspect how ill-tempered and cross-grained he can be."

"I cannot say my husband has a bad temper. He is a little exacting, perhaps, but seldom what you would call hasty; and I do not remember ever to have seen him in a passion."

"How glad you will be when your daughter is at home again! Girls manage to coax their fathers somehow. I have known the daughter to incur merely a playful reprimand where the wife would be severely censured. Miss Wreford is only thirteen, I believe?"

"Just thirteen; but she might pass for several years older, she is so tall."

"So my niece Nellie tells me. Miss Wreford and Nellie are grand allies, it seems. Your daughter was very good to Nellie; when newly arrived at the *Pension*, she was on the point of succumbing to home-sickness. Our Nellie is a regular little homebird, and being the youngest, she has been, I suspect, just a little spoiled by all of us. Miss Wreford is not returning for the vacation, I think Mr. Wreford said?"

"No."

It was a simple answer, but there was something in the tone of the brief negative that roused Mrs. Markham's interest. For Catherine, as she spoke it, changed countenance; her colour rose and went, and a hopeless look came into her eyes.

"Why do you not have her back, if you wish it?" resumed the lady.

"Mr. Wreford thinks it best to keep her at school till her education is finished: he has decided that she remains with Madame de la Tour till she leaves her finally. He *does* talk of taking me over to Paris to see her; but I feel as if the journey would be almost too great an effort."

"It will do you all the good in the world! My dear Mrs. Wreford, believe me, you want *rousing*! You are a little out of health—I am sure you are; and you are

nervous. You require change: one is always tired and seedy at the end of the season. I hope you will set out at once, and take my advice—the vacation is a long one—don't stop all the time at Paris: it is so hot at this period of the year. Go to Fontainebleau,—or, better still, establish yourself at the seaside. Trouville is extra fashionable, and would scarcely suit you, I think—it never pleases me; but Etretat is delightful, and the air is all that one could wish. Besides, it would set Miss Wreford up for the winter months; they study very hard at those Paris boarding-schools, and a thorough rest now and then is essential. By all means *go!* Don't hesitate, but bother Mr. Wreford till he says you may pack your trunks."

"I think I will," replied Catherine, smiling faintly. Mrs. Markham's kindly, cheery manner always gave her heart. Sometimes she wondered how it would have fared with her had she, from the first, asserted herself in her friend's style—a style at once vigorous and spirited, yet not unamiable. It really did not seem so impossible to "bother" Robert, while incited thereunto by Mrs. Markham, who had one day said to her: "My dear, I *managed* my husband all the days of our wedded life, but he never knew it, and in fact supposed that he managed me, and kept me in first-rate order. We always loved each other, we scarcely ever disagreed, and when he died I lost all that I valued most on earth. You would like to know how I did it. I would give you the secret, but I cannot. In order to manage your husband successfully, you must be to the manner born: it requires genius—a certain genius, which can no more be imparted than the gifts of poetry, eloquence, or painting. Husband-managers are born, not made."

Catherine felt that she was *not* to the "manner born," and then, thought she, "there are husbands *and* husbands,—those who are manageable and those who are not; and mine is certainly of the latter class. After all, I am not sure that I should like a husband who could be managed, though I should be glad sometimes to influence Robert, and to have a voice in those decisions which affect our private life."

That evening, when all the guests were gone, and Robert was putting away some photographic views, Catherine boldly inquired when he should be ready to start for Paris. Her taking the initiative was something so rare that he was really startled, and turned to her with a look almost of astonishment. "I did not positively say we were going," he replied.

"Oh yes, you did," she answered, laughingly; "at least you as good as said so! There now, don't scold me for being illogical. I know I am illogical, being only a common-place, weak-minded woman. But positively, Robert, I have set my heart on the trip, and I am not sure but that I shall go off on my own responsibility if you refuse to take me."

"I think I see you on your travels! I hope you will publish your tour, under the title of 'Adventures of *Materfamilias*.'"

"I think I could keep out of scrapes; besides, I fancy I could persuade Mrs. Markham to accompany me, and she thinks no more of travelling about the Continent than you do of going to Fenchurch Street. I should be as safe under her wing as with you."

"Perhaps you would prefer Mrs. Markham's society to mine?"

"You know better than that. If you will take me, I shall be satisfied, and wish for no other companion; if you will not—that is, if you cannot because of business pressure,—why, then, I think I shall, with your permission, make my own arrangements."

She spoke so calmly and, at the same time, so pleasantly, that Robert felt quite confounded. What did she mean by asserting herself in this fashion? He did not altogether like it, and yet he did not exactly know how he could reprimand her. What she said was quite natural, and was not more than any married woman might venture—unless, indeed, she were wedded to a Turk. And Robert hated to be thought a tyrant; there was nothing he disliked more than throwing down the gauntlet at home: he preferred rather to draw it on—the firmest of steel gauntlets, but dexterously covered with softest velvet. No; he could not very well chide her for her

assurance. Had he not twitted her, times without number, for her weakness and timidity? At length he replied — "I should not, of course, permit you to go under any escort but my own. Really, you have become quite enterprising all at once. When do you wish to set out?"

"Whenever you please. I have not many preparations to make, only the sooner I know the better, that I may set things in order at home, and not be hurried at the last. Anything like hurry upsets me now, and makes me lose nerve—I am not half as strong as I used to be."

Robert stopped sorting the photos, and looked earnestly at his wife. She often complained of not being strong; she had never been quite the thing since that unaccountable illness of hers without a name in the beginning of the year. Yes! she was certainly thinner; her hands had lost their plumpness, her cheeks were less round, dimples had given place to hollows, and she stooped a good deal, and seemed continually in need of support. Nevertheless, she had by no means deteriorated in looks; what she had lost in flesh she had gained in outline, and if colouring had faded, there was a decided improvement in expression. Her lovely brown hair was as glossy as ever, and scarcely less abundant; her eyes were softer and more lustrous, if they sparkled less; and there were times when all the bloom of health was on her cheeks. Still, there was a change—a want of tone, a continual recurring of trifling indisposition; and Robert, when he took the trouble to think at all about Catherine's health, could not but acknowledge that she was far from as well as she ought to be, or as she always had been aforetime. So now he observed—"You are continually saying that you are not strong, Catherine, and I see myself that you are scarcely up to the mark; but why don't you consult Rayner again?"

"There is nothing to consult him about. I have no actual illness: I simply suffer from debility, and sometimes, though slightly, from indigestion, and I am always tired, even when I do nothing."

"Why don't you take port and quinine?"

"I do; I take a certain quantity, and make grimaces over it, every morning."

"You shall have a mutton chop regularly for your breakfast. I'll give cook the order myself."

"Thank you! but I am afraid I could not eat it."

"Nonsense! You must force yourself to eat it. How can you expect to grow strong, or to keep up such strength as you have, without eating? You require plenty of nourishment; I am convinced of it. It is beef and mutton you require, not jellies and bits of chicken, and spoonfuls of white soup. And you should drink stout and port wine, instead of so much claret and water, and wishy-washy tea. I must take you in hand myself."

"Well, if we go abroad together, you can do so nicely. But I warn you that I cannot take all your prescriptions. Beef and mutton require a healthy appetite, and as to wine, you forget that I have never been used to it, and have only taken it as medicine, in homœopathic doses, since my illness. And I believe it makes me feverish; wine does not suit everybody. There was a time when you thought yourself better without it."

"I was better without it, because I could not well afford it, and I really did not need it. I think a little does me good now; and then, you see, a man in my position ought to keep a tolerable cellar, and to know something about different vintages. It is clearly my duty, under existing circumstances, to take wine, and to dispense it liberally to my guests."

"What are those existing circumstances?"

"Now, really, my dear, you are so dull—so very dense, I may say. I would give anything, Catherine, if you only had a little natural ambition—if you and I only saw eye to eye. We might, in the end, take any position, hold our own in any society, if you and I did but work together."

"If I could only understand what it is you require! I go into company, and I receive, as you call it; I dress well—extravagantly, it seems to me; I strive to conform to the ordinary usages of society, and I do my best to study etiquette. And I think, Robert, it is that, as much as anything, which undermines my health. It is the constant strain, the continual keeping up of appearances, the playing a part, so to speak, to which I feel myself unequal, that

wears away my energies, and makes me so often dull and languid."

"If you have too much to do, engage another servant,—or two, if you think you need them."

"We have too many already. Every fresh servant is an added care."

"I must confess you are an enigma to me. If you had complained of '*cares*' when you had only one inefficient servant, when you had to make every shilling you spent go as far as twelve pence could go, when you had to make all your own clothes, and Anne's, and all my linen, and to turn everything, both food and raiment, and, indeed, all our poor belongings, to the very best advantage—if then you had sometimes grumbled a little, one could well have pardoned it. You must often have been tired in those days, quite legitimately tired; your fingers must have ached; you must have been wearied in head and limb; yet you seldom seemed overdone, and a good day's work appeared to fatigue you less than half-an-hour of comparative idleness does now."

"For one thing, I was younger then."

"And so was I. But I never felt better able to cope with difficulties, to toil in the counting-house, to engage in new lines of business, to decide knotty points, and make intricate calculations, than at this present hour. I feel equal to any emergency, ready to meet all possible demands upon my energies, my powers, mental or physical, my tact, my prudence, to a large extent, my patience! I experience all the vigour and daring of youth without its presumption or its inevitable ignorance; I rejoice in all the strength of matured manhood, without one sign or token of decay; I possess the caution, the sagacity, the far-sightedness of middle age, without the mistrust, the suspicion, the tormenting doubts of later years. In short, my dear, I know myself—I *feel myself*—to be still at my very best!"

"And I thank God that so it is," said Catherine, lifting her sweet, serious face to his. "You are at the noon of life—I, though a year younger, have fully passed the meridian. Robert dear, I sometimes think the sun of my earthly existence is setting fast—is sinking in the west."

"Nothing of the kind! You will make old bones as well as I, and we shall keep our golden wedding-day, I should not wonder! Though, to do that, one ought to marry before thirty—eh, my dear? What is it the Psalmist says? '*The days of our years are three-score years and ten; and if, by reason of strength, they be four-score years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow.*' Ah! to enjoy one's golden wedding-day, one ought to marry soon after twenty. But I see what it is, Catherine; you really do require a change—a thorough change—and nothing could be better for you than the journey to Paris. Let me see! I have my work cut out for this week; after to-night every minute will be fully occupied till late on Saturday. Then there will be certain arrangements, orders to be given, matters to be put in train, exigencies to be provided against, &c., &c., *ad libitum—ad infinitum*. I am afraid I cannot say earlier than the end of next week. I suppose you can be ready by that time?"

"Oh, yes; I am so rich now in clothes that I really require nothing beyond a proper travelling-dress, and a new waterproof."

"Get all that you want. And, above all, don't forget the *etceteras*. A lady's costume should always be *complete*, harmonious, and finished in all its details."

"What a curious person you are, Robert! You understand everything, from merchandise to mercery; I feel sure you could make a steam-engine, or write a book, if you tried."

"I flatter myself I could do most things if I had only determined on the doing of them," complacently replied Robert, who fully appreciated his wife's compliments. "After all, it is the universal genius who conquers the world, not the man of a single gift, however valuable. There are men of *faculty*, as well as women of *faculty*, I guess; and breadth is preferable to depth in many particulars. I would rather be a common *jack-of-all-trades*, than a musty, fusty, arrogant college don, who knows a lot of things—mostly useless things—which he never turns to any good account."

"Of course; who would not? If I were a man I would rather be anything in the world than a middle-aged

Fellow of a College, who, by dint of a good memory and skilful coaching, has gained a certain point, at which he stops, narrowing, rusting, and retrograding as the years go on. But I ought to say I am only quoting from Philip Rutland."

"I was wondering what you could know about professors—or, rather, Fellows of Colleges. Rutland is in the right. Not one in a hundred of those erudite 'fellows' ever makes his mark in the world."

"But there is some good in fellowships, surely?"

"Oh, yes! they are excellent spurs and incentives to youthful aspirations. It is, of course, an honour to a young man to win a fellowship—especially what is called an open-fellowship; but it is a reproach, deepening, as years go on, into a disgrace, to hold the same persistently. However, that is not a question which need trouble us, as we have no son whose lucky stars, or ill-fortune, might bestow upon him so doubtful a blessing. And now, I think, we had better go to bed, for I must be in Fenchurch Street by nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"And I may write to Anne to say we are really coming?"

"There is no reason why you should not. Indeed, you had better write, and ask her to consult Madame as to a good hotel for us. It will simplify matters so very much if we know where to go straight from the railway."

"And we might spend part of our holiday at the seaside? I want bracing, you say, and it would be well for you, as well as for Anne, who has to work very hard at school."

"We will think about it; it sounds well. A fortnight in Paris, and a fortnight at the coast, would make a nice variety. I cannot spare longer than a month."

A month—a whole month with Anne—a whole month away from the responsibilities of housekeeping! A whole month free from those "social duties," which had grown to be, of late, so thorough an incubus! The prospect was delightful. Catherine felt an almost childlike glee in contemplating it; she could only tell herself that it seemed almost too good to be true; that, as all sublunary things are uncertain, all mundane plans liable to change and

overthrow, it behoved her not to count too securely upon her approaching happiness.

But the days passed swiftly onwards, and nothing untoward occurred to prevent the proposed journey. There was no great failure in the commercial world, no mercantile crisis, such as might make it imperative on Robert to remain at his post; no managers of departments were sick, or idle, or absent without leave; no underlings chose that particular era to be on the strike. And on the appointed morning Catherine and Robert left their home, *en route* for Paris.

They had a pleasant journey to Dover, and a favourable passage across the Straits. They rested all night at Amiens, and reached their destination next day, Anne, under proper escort, being at the station to meet them. The intense happiness of Catherine's heart who may describe!

As for Anne herself, her spirits were exuberant. She looked so well, she had grown so much, her manner was so greatly improved, Madame had so good an account to give of her pupil, she had so much to hear of home, so much to tell of her school-life, and, above all, so much pride and pleasure in acting as guide and mouthpiece to her parents; for by this time Anne's French was tolerably fluent, and she had no difficulty in making herself understood. Both father and mother were proud of their girl, as she negotiated their affairs, and piloted them through all the small difficulties incidental to strangers in a foreign capital. Catherine revelled in her child's brightness and pleasant chat; Robert saw in all she did and said the promise of an excellent woman of business. It was a happy, thrice happy time; and all three—two, at least, of them—looked back with tender memory, in after years, on those sweet halcyon days, that seemed, in retrospect, all calm, golden sunshine without a cloud.

I need not tell you what they did, or what places they visited, during their brief Paris sojourn. Anne and her father saw everything that could be seen in the fortnight of their stay; Catherine, being easily tired, was sometimes content to stay at home or sit with a book in the Tuilleries Gardens, while her husband and daughter

undertook the more fatiguing excursions. And then, at the close of their second week, they set off for Etretat, and found pleasant, comfortable rooms overlooking the sea.

The hotel in which they were staying grew very full a day or two after their arrival, and they naturally congratulated themselves on being established before the rush came. Changes also took place in the disposition of the guests at the *table d'hôte*, and one day the Wrefords found themselves close to a well-dressed, very handsome woman, who looked about twenty-seven years of age, and whose manners and conversation pleased Mr. Wreford wonderfully. Both Robert and Catherine were glad to have somebody with whom they could exchange courtesies without an interpreter, and Anne was getting just a little tired of translating English into French, and French into English, at every turn. On the second evening of their acquaintance, a certain intimacy began to spring up, which was wonderfully developed by finding out that at home they were almost neighbours. The Wrefords' habitat was, as we know, at Hackney; Mrs. Russell, for that was the lady's name, lived at Upper Clapton.

"I wonder we have not met before," said Catherine; "our house cannot be more than a mile from yours. I have often walked to Alvanley Terrace in less than twenty minutes."

"Ah! but I only came to reside there last February," said Mrs. Russell; "the weather was so severe I walked out very little for some weeks. In May I went to Hastings, from thence to Ryde and Ventnor. Afterwards, I returned to London, just to make needful arrangements for a prolonged and indefinite absence, and three weeks ago I arrived here, and was just getting tired of the place, when you came, and changed monotony into enlivenment."

"You pay us a great compliment," said Robert, with a courteous inclination. "We also have appreciated the beauties and advantages of Etretat more fully since we had the good fortune to make your acquaintance."

A little later, when all were in the drawing-room, music was proposed, and then several gentlemen, both French and English, were urgent in requesting Mrs. Russell to

sing. Without any excuses, and with the air of a person who fully knew her powers, the lady at once consented, and was forthwith conducted to the pianoforte. She sang without notes, and her singing was somewhat rare and wonderful. She had one of those sweet, rich *mezzo-soprano* voices, which now and then deepen into mellow, thrilling *contralto*; her tones were full and pure; ringing, yet not loud in the highest notes; her intonation was perfect, her style simple, but most expressive. More than one of her songs moved some of the audience to tears.

Robert stood behind her, and watched her white, slender fingers, glittering with gems, wander over the ivory keys. She played quite as well as she sang, and when, at the last, she dashed into a difficult and brilliant fantasia on several well-known airs, all the room was enraptured with her splendid execution. Mr. Wreford admired her perfectly-shaped, snowy hands, and the poise of her fair, rounded wrists, from which she had removed several valuable bracelets, before commencing her performance. Her dress was in such excellent taste that it pleased the eye without distracting attention from its wearer; it was fitting raiment for a beautiful and graceful gentlewoman; that was all that could be said about it. As for herself, she was tall, decidedly above the middle height, her figure lithe, well-developed, exquisitely rounded, and what the French call *svelte*; her complexion, a clear, pale olive, her lips ruby red, and her cheeks faintly glowing when she was interested in the conversation, or in the passing scene; her eyes, dark as night, shaded by long, black lashes, and overarched by well-defined but delicately-pencilled eyebrows; her features regular and clear-cut, her expression rather mournful in repose, but easily roused into sparkling, arch vivacity. To crown all, she wore her rich, raven hair in silky folds and coils, that gave her the air of an empress, and all her movements were graceful and majestic. Robert thought he had never in his life seen a more beautiful woman than this stately, charming Mrs. Russell; and he was not far wrong.

Later, when the gentlemen went out for their smoke upon the terrace, Robert accompanied them, though he cared little or nothing for the fragrant *cheroot* which he

lighted. In the course of conversation, it was quite natural to speak of Mrs. Russell and her singing.

"That's what I call music, now!" said a young Frenchman, who spoke fluent English, with the least possible accent. "I care not for your Italian *bravuras*; I would rather hear Madame Russell sing one of her simple English ballads, or a German *Lied*, than go to the opera."

"Do you know this Mrs. Russell?" asked Robert of an elderly gentleman, who was puffing away at his side. "She seems to me a very charming woman."

"Truly charming!" replied he of the meerschaum. "She is beautiful, accomplished, and amiable."

"And tolerably rich, I should suppose?"

"Ah, no! I fear not; from what I can gather she is—for one so evidently well-born—rather poor."

"But she wears costly ornaments. Her jewels are undoubtedly valuable."

"Ah, yes! that is easily explained. She is the widow of a rich old fellow, who made a goddess of her while she lived, and left her at his death with scarcely any provision. Her step-son, who is older than herself, from respect to his father's memory, allows her something yearly. I don't know how much, but it is, I believe, a miserable pittance for such a woman, accustomed, too, as she was during her married life, to every luxury."

"How long has she been a widow?"

"Rather more than two years. She still wears a sort of *demi-dévol*, as you may have observed. I should think she will marry again before long."

"Is there any probability of such an event?" Curiously enough, Robert hoped to hear that there was *not*, though how it could affect him he would have found it difficult to say. He would decidedly rather not be told that the charming Mrs. Russell had made a second choice. His companion went on—"She has, as you remarked, plenty of jewels, and she has shawls and lace that make the women here turn pale with envy. As a rule, she is not a favourite with her own sex."

"I don't wonder at that. Women are naturally jealous. They hate, on principle, the sister-woman who outshines them in any particular; especially in beauty, or in the

adjuncts of beauty—dress and gems! I wonder how it is that women are so low-minded and spiteful, and given to petty animosities?"

"I cannot concede that women *are* what you say. There are some, of course, who display all the attributes you mention—and regular cats they are! But there are others, and a good many of them, thank God! truly noble creatures, who well deserve all the service and honour that men can render them. I never will join in the universal cry against woman's shallowness and folly."

"I perceive you are a lady's man."

"No, I am not. I only speak as I think all men who have had mothers and sisters, and who have, or may have, wives and daughters, ought to speak. Some women are men's curse, I know; but is not that largely our own fault? However that may be, one thing is certain, that many women are born for blessing, and that man would suffer both spiritually and mentally were it not for their pure, sweet influence."

And while Robert held this conversation under the stars, among the autumn roses, Catherine and Anne were upstairs discussing the people whom they had met below.

"She is beautiful!" cried Anne, enthusiastically; "I never saw anybody so beautiful out of a picture! And how she sings! I could not help crying while she sang that 'Lady of the Lea.' And as for 'Kathleen Mavourneen,' it was—oh! *scrumptuous*! But—I am not quite sure that I quite like her! How Madame would lecture me for these two *quites* in one short sentence! Do you like her, mother?"

"My dear, I know really nothing about her. She *seems* very nice; but a talk over the dinner-table, and a little music afterwards, is scarcely enough to enable one to form an opinion. She has seen as much of us as we have of her, and that is next to nothing."

"Ah, mother darling! everybody *must* see that you are both sweet and true. I think *she* is sweet—outside sweet, certainly; but *true*? I don't know. Somehow, mother, I don't feel as if she were, and that is why I do not quite like her."

"My dear child, don't foster an uncharitable spirit!"

“ I won’t, mother. I am afraid I am uncharitable sometimes. But you can’t *make* yourself believe either in things or in people, can you? That’s why it has always seemed to me as stupid as it was cruel to persecute people for their religion.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CHANGE IN THE PROGRAMME.

THAT most delightful month wore speedily to its close, and Catherine and Anne were already enduring in anticipation the pangs of another parting. But just as packing preparations were being commenced, Robert announced his intention of remaining in France for another fortnight. He came into the room where his wife and daughter were already collecting their properties, and said, “ I have been having a long gossip with Mrs. Russell, and what do you think she has persuaded me to do? ”

“ Indeed, I cannot guess,” replied Catherine; “ perhaps to go to Dieppe, and buy some of the ivories we were talking about.”

“ Something more than that; something you will better appreciate. I have decided that we shall all return to Paris, instead of sending Anne under escort, as we had arranged; and we will have another fortnight in the gay capital! Now, what do you say to that? ”

“ It will be delightful to be together so much longer; but why should we spend the time in Paris rather than here? Paris is frightfully hot, everybody says, and the breezes here are so fresh and cool. I am sure the sea is doing Anne great good.”

“ Anne is your sole consideration. I am tired of the monotony and idle gossip of Etretat. I am sick of the sight of the bathers, and the fishwomen, and the shell-

toys for sale. I am weary of sipping coffee or ices, and listening to that noisy band; and we have taken every drive for miles around. I think we have 'done' Etretat excellently."

"Of course, if you prefer Paris; but I thought you said yesterday how thoroughly you had enjoyed this place, and how sorry you were to leave it."

Now, this was a mistake on Catherine's part. Men—least of all, men of Robert Wreford's type—intensely dislike being convicted of inconsistency of speech; and annoyance generally takes the form of resentment when it is the wife who ventures upon the rash experiment.

"It is not pleasant to have one's own words thrust back upon one," returned Robert, with his most offended air. In fact, he looked "affronted"—which is not quite the same thing as being offended. Small souls are "affronted," when larger souls find it difficult to be offended. "It is just like you, Catherine," he resumed; "whatever my plan is, you have always something to oppose to it—*some* objection! If I had wished to stay on here, you would instantly have urged our return to Paris. Ah! I know; but if, as some wise body says, 'the woman that hesitates is lost,' the man who yields to the caprice of woman is lost indeed! I will not remain at Etretat after to-morrow—in fact, I believe our rooms are taken; but I will, if Paris is so disagreeable, commence our homeward journey together, and at once send Anne back to school under proper protection."

"Oh, no, Robert; I did not mean that, and you know you did say Etretat was charming; and only last night that little man, just arrived at the *table d'hôte*, was telling us how he had been baked and stewed and grilled for the last few days in Paris."

"Some people are always roasted or frozen; and I am sure I don't want to force you into what you dislike, or into what may be bad for you. I am no tyrant, and I am ready to let you go your own way if only you will not check me in going mine."

"Go my own way! Oh, Robert, I do not deserve that! Husband and wife should never have separate ways; they must not have separate ways, if they are to

live happily together. Of course, dear, your way is mine; I should be grieved indeed, hopelessly, if it were otherwise."

"Then why make demur? However, I do not, I repeat, wish to force you into any line of action which may be displeasing. Mrs. Russell will be kind enough, I am sure, to see Anne safely under Madame's wing, and you and I can return to England to-morrow. Will that content you?"

"Oh, Robert! how you will misunderstand me! As if I would give up Anne one hour sooner than I could help! Go back home to-morrow, when I may keep her for another fortnight! I had no idea you were tired of Etretat; but, since it is so, let us return to Paris by all means. We will not trouble Mrs. Russell. Besides, she was talking of Trouville."

"She has given up that scheme; she will be wanted in London next month. Last night's post brought her important letters, so she will just run up to Paris again to make final purchases, see a friend or two, and go back home."

"Then we shall all travel together, I suppose?"

"Of course. And you had better let her do a little shopping for you in Paris; she speaks the language like a native. I wish you did."

"I wish I did! But it is too late in the day to learn a foreign language. Anne must make up for all her mother's deficiencies. I think she gets on with the people here quite as well as Mrs. Russell."

"She can '*parlez-vous*' very glibly, I am glad to hear; but, of course, she has not Mrs. Russell's experience and nice tact. Very well—that is settled, then; we shall be in Paris to-morrow evening. Oh, dear! who can fathom the mysteries of a woman's will! A woman is never quite sure what she wants, only she feels it incumbent on her to make some sort of protest against every arrangement proposed by her husband."

"Now, papa, you are unfair!" cried Anne, who had listened silently, but with keen attention. "Mother simply suggested what she thought would be agreeable to yourself, and the moment you objected she withdrew

the proposition, and was quite content to follow out your wishes. I think a woman knows her own mind as well as a man; but if she is married, she must submit to have her mind made up for her, whether she like it or not. That is one reason why I intend to live single—unless, indeed, I can find a perfectly reasonable man who will let me have my way—moderately, that is."

"Upon my word, Miss Wreford, you have some very pronounced opinions for a young lady of your tender years! Pray, are your sentiments the results of Madame's superior instructions?"

"Certainly not, papa. I have told you before that I am resolved not to marry. Madame, of course, never speaks of such a thing as marriage to us; but I do know that she considers it a girl's duty to take submissively and contentedly the *parti* selected for her husband. Girls don't marry in France, you know, papa; they are married by their parents—that is to say, they are *established*; and the gentlemen are *rangés*. The mothers take it in hand, I believe. The fathers provide the *dot*."

"But," said Catherine, "suppose they do not like each other?"

"Oh! but that would show one to be badly brought up. And, as far as I can learn, neither bride nor bridegroom have much opportunity of finding out what sort of person they are going to marry. I know all about it. When a girl leaves school, her mother generally has a husband ready provided for her; it has been previously arranged between her and the gentleman's mother, or nearest female relation, and the *dot* and the settlement are all decided. Then the *prétendu* is formally introduced, and mademoiselle courtesys, and acknowledges him as her *futur*. She may, perhaps, let him touch the tips of her fingers; I am not quite sure, but I know a private interview between *fiancés* is seldom, if ever, permitted. After the betrothal, the *fiancé* attends mademoiselle to mass, and to places of amusement, and he makes her presents; but there is no such thing as *spooning* ever thought of, and the wedding takes place in a few weeks, and then, I suppose, they may do as they please, as much as an English couple, provided they commit no breach of *étiquette*."

"My dear Anne," said Catherine gravely, "where did you learn that objectionable phrase, 'spooning'?"

"Oh, mother, it is quite common. It is a very stupid phrase, I know; for what have spoons to do with making love? but it is English. There is no French for it, of course, because the thing itself in France does not exist."

"It is slang, my dear. Do not get into the habit of using slang. And be thankful you are not a French *demoiselle*, virtually compelled to accept the gentleman whom we might choose for you, without any regard to your own inclinations."

"Oh, as to that, mother, I do not think I should much dislike it. If one *must* be married—and it's a tremendous disgrace to be an old maid in France; either you must be a *religieuse* or *Madame*—the system must save a world of trouble. And the French girls say it answers very well, and that married people are quite as happy in France as in England. The Americans say it is only a polite way of being bought and sold."

"They are right. The whole thing is a mistake, Anne, as you will see for yourself when you are a few years older. At present, you cannot understand the full demerits of the system, nor need you try to do so; only be sure that marriage without affection is displeasing to God; and I very much doubt whether, in His eyes, a loveless, mercenary union—what Mrs. Russell calls a mere '*mariage de convenance*'—is any marriage at all."

"Mrs. Russell would be the last to make such a marriage," said Robert.

"Yet I should say her marriage with Mr. Russell was something of the kind," replied Catherine. "He was more than old enough to be her father, and he was very rich."

"She told me all about it; she was an orphan, and almost portionless, and badly treated by the relations who had her in charge. Old Mr. Russell proposed, and they absolutely drove her into a marriage with him. And he made her very happy, she says; he petted her, and let her have her own way in everything, and, but for an untoward chance, he would have left her amply dowered. She, knowing no other affection, never having had the shadow

of an attachment to any one else, was quite constant, and she deeply regretted his loss."

"She is so handsome; I wonder she has not married again."

"I do not wonder; she is not the person to be satisfied with any ordinary match. She was a girl when she married Mr. Russell, and she simply obeyed orders which she could not resist; now she is a woman fully *matured*, and well acquainted with the world's ways. No *mediocre* sort of man will ever be accepted by her. She will be very particular in a second marriage; she says so."

"She seems to make quite a confidant of you, Robert."

"Yes, she does; and yet it is not her way to make confidants, she tells me; but she and I accord, and somehow understand each other. And then she has taken an immense liking to you, Catherine, and she is quite fond of Anne—*éprise*, I think she said. I believe I could soon learn to speak French. Only an hour ago she said, 'I think your wife is *lovely*, Mr. Wreford; what a beauty she must have been in her youth! And such a gentle creature, and so sweet tempered! But, I am afraid, sadly delicate.' And then she asked if your health had not always been feeble, because it appeared as if your education had been rather neglected, not playing upon any instrument, and knowing no language save your own."

"What did you say?"

"I said, *yes*—your education had been sadly neglected. Of course, I was not going to tell her that you never were at any school worth calling such; that you had literally no education at all—only a little instruction in the three R's, to make the best of it. And that reminds me, Catherine, you need not expose your ignorance."

"Have I done so?"

"Last night you calmly owned to not knowing the difference between latitude and longitude; and you coolly asked Colonel Gardner, not two hours ago, 'Where are the Ural Mountains?'"

"Was there any harm in that? I really wanted to know, in order to understand the conversation which interested me. Why, Mrs. Lewis, who was educated at the best London schools, did not know the exact position

of those mountains, and she acknowledged her ignorance."

"She could afford to do so; a lady who has had all educational advantages may well admit that she does not know this or that. A woman who was turned into the workroom at fourteen or earlier should be slow to betray the inferior position of her youth. Nothing tells what you actually are so much as lack of education."

"Granted. But, Robert, whose fault was it that no one sent me to a good school, or provided me with an efficient home-governess?"

"No one's *fault*, I should say. I was in no better plight myself; but I always took good care that, as I rose in the social scale, people should not suspect my antecedents—that is to say, the disadvantages under which I laboured in my boyhood. No one would guess now that —" he was about to say something explicit; but, bethinking himself of his daughter's presence, finished up with—"that those disadvantages were what they were."

"But why pretend to be something we are not? Why make believe that we are now in the position to which we were born? Why be ashamed of our origin?"

"Really, Catherine, you do ask such ridiculous questions, and you put things in such a strange, uncomfortable way! Of course, we need not *pretend*! I hate fibbing from my heart; you know I do. But why acquaint all our present friends with past circumstances? Why tell them gratuitously what is better untold, and what they cannot possibly care to know? I suppose it is in the nature of women to be over-communicative, and to reveal that which good taste as well as common prudence bids them not betray. I never had a desire to speak any more than to write an autobiography. You, I am sure, if unchecked, would never fail to tell to your friends all round that you had once been a dressmaker."

"On my own account I should never try to hide the fact. Personally, I am no more ashamed of my old dress-making than I am of going down to the *table d'hôte* in a handsome dress, which is in a style I never attempted or even conceived. I think, in my inmost heart, I am

prouder of myself in my ancient capacity than I am of myself as a fine lady with nothing to do."

" You have plenty to do, if you could but see it. It is your business in life now to maintain my position, to assist in the establishment of the *status* to which I lay claim. You need not be exactly *ashamed* of the dress-making—which, however, I heartily wish you could forget; but—"

" I shall never be in the least ashamed of it," hastily interposed Catherine. " I was only doing my duty in the station to which it pleased God in those days to call me; I ate not the bread of idleness. If I had been a menial, a hired servant, drudging on my hands and knees with pail and scrubbing-brush, or standing at the washing-tub, or answering my employer's bell, I should not be ashamed of it! Why should I? Honest work is honourable under all circumstances. The dishonour lies in being ashamed of it."

" If you had been *that*, I should never have dreamed of making you my wife; one must draw a line somewhere."

" And you drew it at dressmaking, it seems."

" Father—mother! *don't!*" cried Anne beseechingly; " it hurts me to hear you say such things. I do not think one need obtrude one's whole history on people; but I do think mother is right in not being even the least bit ashamed of her real origin. She was always quite respectable; she never did anything that she need blush for; and if she even had been that imaginary maid-of-all-work, scouring floors and washing dishes, she need not blush for that if she scoured right well, and made the dishes clean. And there is a Latin proverb—' *laborare est orare*, ' which means that true, good, honest work is equal with devotion; ' to labour is to pray '—that's the literal translation. Father, I promise you I will never voluntarily tell what you wish kept secret, but please to understand, now and always, I am not—I never shall be—ashamed of the poor boy that came to London, six-and-twenty years ago, with one little trunk, and a few shillings in his pocket, and a good character, and nothing else. Nor of that good girl who once went out dressmaking, and did work at home, and was always famous for nice sewing and an easy fit.

And, please, I had rather not talk about it any more, for it vexes me to see mother vexed, and I can't help thinking she is right."

Robert stood amazed; he did not know how to answer his girl, who stood there brave and outspoken, as he always said he wished her to be. Her cheeks were aglow, her eyes shone with a steady light; she spoke proudly, yet sensibly and respectfully. *Mademoiselle Vréford*, as she said Madame de la Tour called her, was clearly a very different person from little Anne of Ivyside. And somehow, her father, though discomfited, and inclined to resent her words, could not reprimand and snub her as in old time. Anne was learning to think and to discriminate, and she was proud, with a pride which he only admired, though past the scope of his comprehension. All he ventured on was: "My dear, you have small experience of the world; when you are a few years older you will understand that people are only too apt to take us, not at, but under, our own valuation. And I agree with you, that our present subject of discourse is an unprofitable one, though every now and then, through your mother's pertinacity, we drift into it. As for yourself, I do not think you are entirely unambitious."

"I don't think I am," said Anne, drily.

CHAPTER XIX.

"GOOD-BYE, MOTHER."

AND so it came to pass that on the following evening the Wrefords and their new friend found themselves again in Paris. Under Mrs. Russell's guidance, Catherine made sundry purchases for herself and Anne. Nearly everything she bought would have gone to Anne had not

Robert interfered, and desired her to provide herself with a regular Parisian outfit. He was increasingly anxious that she should be fashionably attired, and that she should benefit by Mrs. Russell's experience and superior knowledge of what was *ton*, and what was *chic*. He even insisted on her having a dress, or rather an entire costume, from *Worth*; but he was wonderfully amazed when the bill was presented to him. "So much for such a simple thing as that!" he said, appealing to Mrs. Russell; "if it had been, as I naturally imagined it would be, something very much out of the way, I should not have grudged the amount; but such a very simple affair!"

"It is simply *perfect*," replied Mrs. Russell; "it is the very simplicity which constitutes its charm and actual merit. But if you will examine it, you must confess that you have quite your money's *worth*—really, now, I did not mean a pun! And then, of course, you pay for consummate taste. I should know a dress of *Worth's* the world over; anybody in the best sets would know it, and it at once stamps the wearer as being some one out of the ordinary way. The worst of it is, when you once get accustomed to *Worth's* style, you never fancy any other; though, for my part, I have had ravishing dresses from *Grandhomme*! And if you let *Worth* dress you, you want your purse continually replenished."

"I should think so!" said Robert, a little ruefully. He was growing accustomed to spending money, but M. *Worth's* bill absolutely staggered him. "And so little to show for such a ridiculous sum," he kept repeating, as he surveyed the unlucky costume, which really was—what Mrs. Russell pronounced it to be—"simply perfect."

"Now, I beg your pardon, Mr. Wreford," she resumed; "but it is very clear that your taste wants educating. The dress is lovely, and exactly suits your wife's style of beauty; the delicate tints, the plain yet ample folds, that exquisite embroidery! What more could the most fastidious require? And *Worth* never makes the smallest mistake, even in detail. He would go to the stake rather than give you an unbecoming shade, or a superfluous bow, or just a plait too little. I shall never forget his horror when I asked him once if I might wear *mauve*. He re-

plied, with the deepest emotion, 'Madame, it is not for me to forbid you *mauve*, or any other colour which kills your complexion; but not to win Paradise would I myself dress you in a colour so detestable. *Mauve* is for the *blondes* solely ! ' He is an artist, you know; no one ever thinks of *Worth* as a tradesman; he will not dress *anybody*. I have known him refuse people at first sight, though they were ready to pay him whatever he demanded. I knew an English lady, with three fat, plain, awkward daughters, and she almost went down on her knees to the autocrat, and implored him, with tears in her eyes, to take *carte blanche*, and make her stout, heavy girls presentable. But neither prayers nor bribes were of any avail. *Worth* absolutely refused to dress these young women, who could not be made to look like ladies at any price, and they and their mother went away inconsolable, as well they might. Imagine the shame and disgrace of being dismissed by *Worth* as impracticable ! '

"I should have felt neither shame nor disgrace had he refused my custom," said Catherine. "But that it would have annoyed my husband, I wish he had; for I feel quite wicked at spending so much money on myself."

"You will be the best-dressed woman in all Hackney, though I am not sure that that is much of a compliment. I am not quite certain that any Hackney lady will recognise *Worth's* handiwork when she sees it."

To tell the truth, Catherine cared little about the dress, though it certainly was the most elegant and becoming robe she had ever worn. It was a positive relief when Robert grumbled at the price, which she thought was simply scandalous—"simply perfect" as the dress might be. And she wondered what she should do with it at home, and felt quite certain that it never would be worn out. Mrs. Russell assured her that *Worth's* things were never intended to be worn out; as soon as they had lost their first bloom and freshness of fashion, they were to be replaced. And then, as they were alone, Catherine said, gravely, "We could not afford it. Indeed, I am afraid we are, as it is, far exceeding the sum we ought to spend on mere pleasure and adornment."

"I hardly fancy Mr. Wreford is the sort of man to be

imprudently lavish; generous and liberal, no doubt, but strictly prudent."

"Yes," said Catherine, briefly; she did not care to discuss Robert with this brilliant new acquaintance, of whom she knew so little. "I was not so much considering the actual expenditure," she continued, "as the spirit of it. I cannot feel that, as a Christian woman, I am justified in giving so much time to mere outside show. It oppresses me, it wearies me, and, what is worse, it condemns me. The cost of this one dress—which I did not really require, and which is out of keeping with all my other *toilettes*, as M. Worth called them—would keep several poor families in comfort for many weeks; it would support ever so many orphan children for I don't know how long."

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Wreford, how good you are! I wish I were like you; indeed I do! But that sort of thing never was my *métier*; I was not religiously brought up. I love what is called 'the world,' and worldly pleasures, though I sometimes think how unsatisfactory, after all, they are, and how much better it must be to have your heart fixed on heavenly things. Well! you and I are going to be fast friends for the future, I trust, and we shall see a great deal of each other, and you must teach me, and show me by your own example, how sweet and blessed a thing the Christian life really is. I want to be religious—I, too, am wearied of mere fashionable enjoyments; you must talk to me, and show me the way, dear friend."

"I am afraid I cannot talk much about religion," said Catherine humbly; "I am not at all clever; even my Sunday-school children, when I had a class long years ago, used to puzzle me by their questions. And I had a mothers'-meeting till the beginning of this year, when I fell ill, and was obliged to give it up; and very often I used to go to the poor women, feeling that I had nothing fresh to say to them, nothing but 'the old, old story' they had heard a hundred times before."

"I have no doubt you taught them a great deal. I am sure it was awfully good of you, with all your own duties, to undertake anything of the kind. What a useless creature I have been all my life; you must set me some

work to do, Mrs. Wreford, when we get back ; and I think I will go to your church. I have taken quite a fancy to Dissenters since I knew you and Mr. Wreford. Dear me ! it must have been a Providence that directed my steps to Etretat ! "

Catherine did not know what to reply. There was a certain unreality in Mrs. Russell's tone that silenced herself ; while at the same time she feared she was uncharitable and suspicious. She only said, "Our church has not a monopoly of the truth, and I do not think you would care for the sort of service you would have there. It is not a fashionable congregation either ; far from it."

" My dear Mrs. Wreford, what does that matter ? Fashionable or unfashionable, we have all souls to be saved."

" To be saved, or to be *lost*," said Catherine, with an unwonted solemnity, and in unwonted phraseology. She had always had an objection to Shibboleths, and in her intercourse with her "mothers," and such people as she spoke with in her tract district, she abstained on principle from the stock phrases which religious people are supposed to employ in dealing with the ungodly. God's love in Christ, His tenderness, His pity, and the blessedness and duty of a Christ-like life, were Catherine's gospel. It was a certain lightness in Mrs. Russell's speech, and a blandness, which, however, was natural to her, that repelled and vexed Mrs. Wreford, and made her glad to terminate the conversation. Then, afterwards, when alone in her room, looking down upon the lighted, busy *boulevard*, she took herself to task, asking, "Am I not to blame in giving her so little encouragement, in not going out to meet her when she says she wants to be a Christian ? Have I any right to question her sincerity ? Can I read people's hearts ? I have enjoyed privileges she has never known in being brought up religiously, and I have learned so much—oh ! so much—during the last few months. I am afraid it is that somehow I do not care that we should be too much mixed up with her. She is very charming, I confess—graceful and clever and good-natured ; how kind she was about taking Anne to *Père la Chaise* yesterday, when she would much

rather have driven with us in the *Bois*. I am not to be compared with her, I know. I could never be like her, and I am afraid Robert wants me to take her as my model. *He* thinks her perfection! Ah! there is the secret out; I am not a bit jealous; I know Robert too well to stand in doubt of him. I should be ashamed of myself; I should deserve his deepest displeasure if, after all these years, I gave way to foolish fancies; but I cannot *quite* like the praise he lavishes on her, or the way in which he sometimes contrasts my style and tone and habits with hers. I hope I am not such a miserable creature as to be vexed at his talking a good deal with her. There are so many subjects on which he and she can converse, and which I only partially comprehend, and sometimes not at all. Only this morning they were discussing 'Schlegel's Philosophy of History.' I never heard of such a book; I never even heard of Schlegel! Robert has read so many books—he has always had a craze for reading, and I have had no time for it till within the last year or two, and I am afraid I have no capacity for deep subjects. No! it is quite natural that Robert should like to converse with so cultured and educated a woman; and I will *not* be selfish! I will *not* be horrid! Only—only, I cannot wish that we should be very, very intimate when we go back; she and I are so different in every way. And Anne does not quite take to her either. How glad I shall be when my Anne comes home again—if—if that happens in my lifetime! I feel sometimes as if this world and all that it contains were quietly slipping away from me. God's will be done! I must leave myself entirely in His hands, and He will do what is best and happiest for me and for my dearest ones."

The extra fortnight was not exceeded, for Robert was now heartily tired of keeping holiday, and pining for Fenchurch Street, where he knew his presence was required. Once more mother and daughter said "good-bye;" and Anne said, through her tears, "When am I to come home again, mother dear? Paris is very nice, and I do like my school; but I feel sometimes as if I were transported for I don't know how long! If I am very good, I should think father might grant me a ticket-of-leave at Christmas?"

"I cannot say, darling. I shall wish for it, you may be sure."

"I shall write to father myself when the time comes. I don't think it can be a question of money; but if it should be, I think I can pay for the journey—one way, at least. I have not spent all my allowance, nor shall I."

"It cannot be a question of money; for though your father will not *waste* a halfpenny, he does not mind spending very freely. Think how much this trip will cost, to say nothing of our new dresses and millinery, and a hundred trifles which we could well have done without."

"Mother, how much a year *has* father?"

"I cannot tell, Anne. I know no more than you. I never did know; your father was always reserved on business matters. But he tells me, and has told me from the first, how much I may spend, and never till lately have I exceeded my stint."

"And why lately, mother?"

"Because I have got out of my depths, Anne. We are living in a style to which I cannot adapt myself; we have expenses which it is impossible to limit; continual requirements of which I never even heard before; daily necessities that once seemed unattainable luxuries. And the housekeeping has, to a great extent, passed out of my own hands."

"That cook is an ogre—a veritable *bête noire*, mother. Why don't you assert yourself, and give her notice?"

"Because I should gain nothing, and possibly lose by so doing. She cooks well, and, from what I hear, is not more extravagant than others of her class. And I really think she is honest, after her own fashion—which said honesty includes more perquisites than I have any idea of. She insists on giving her own orders, she will not undertake her duties on any other terms, and so bills run up from month to month, and my housekeeping purse is always empty too soon. But as your father does not mind—says it is unavoidable, and the usual thing—and just draws cheques for such tradesmen as I cannot pay out of my allowance, I suppose I need not trouble myself. But I do. I cannot help it, Anne; it is foolish, I know, yet I worry myself, and things at home seem all sixes and

sevens. I have nothing actually *to do*—I wish I had! I am to dress well, and visit and entertain in proper style—to be a fine lady, in short, and I never was fitted for the post. The people with whom we now associate have been brought up to the gay, thoughtless, luxurious life they lead. I was not, and you know I am not clever, and so I get bewildered and tired—oh, *so tired!*”

“Poor little mother! If I could but come home and help you! But how does father manage? He was no more born to affluence than you were.”

“He takes to it naturally enough. When I think of our old life of hard work and ceaseless economy and respectable obscurity, and then look around me on all the lavish luxury and unstint and fashionable style of our Ivyside establishment, I sometimes wonder whether I am not dreaming—though which is the more dreamlike, the present or the past, I really can't determine. And all this going about—first-class everywhere, the most fashionable hotels, excursions here and there, purchases *ad libitum*—it literally confounds me! I hope that you will be stronger-minded than your mother, my Anne. I think you are.”

“Nonsense, mother darling. If I grow up half as sensible, to say nothing of being half as good and sweet, or half so lovely, as you are, I shall be quite satisfied with myself. And oh, *ma mère*, you do look nice in that new dress! Father was quite right; it was in the fitness of things that *Worth* should do something for you. The best of everything is just good enough, and only just good enough, for you, dear. You set off the *toilette*; it does not set off you. You look like a dove in it. I am so proud of my pretty mother.”

“Silly child! Naughty flatterer!”

“It is very sincere flattery, mother. I only say what I really feel, to the very bottom of my heart.”

“I know it, love. And your girlish flattery is very sweet to me, old simpleton that I am. It will not hurt me, and no one else in the world will ever say such nice things to me—and *mean* them—as you do. There is no fear of my becoming vain; I am far too conscious of my own deficiencies.”

" Deficiencies ! I am sure you have none ; or, at most, scarcely any. You are the very queen of mothers."

" But not the queen of wives, Anne. I am, alas ! not a woman of faculty, though in the dear old working times I quite believed I was. The simple fact is, I am not fit for upper-class life. I never shall be ; and it is very hard upon your father, who ought to be married to an educated, fashionable woman, who would naturally become a leader in society."

" I wonder what father would have done with a fashionable, expensive lady-wife when he was nobody, and ever so poor ! If you had been wasteful and idle, and *not* a woman of faculty, he would never have been where he is to-day. You helped him on, mother dear, be sure of that."

" I helped him to a certain point, my dear. As a poor man's wife I did my duty, and was proud to do it, for I did it for true love. But I can help him no longer. I am, I fear, a dead weight to him now. He has to advance socially, of course, *in spite of me*. He says so, Anne. I did very well for the poor man ; the rich man's wife should be a lady born."

" Now, mother dear, this is sheer nonsense, you know ! And it does not sound right or proper. I really must scold you if you talk like that. A man's wife is his wife as long as she lives. Why, didn't he take you 'for richer, for poorer' ? And if you helped him in the poorer time, he ought to help you in the richer. One good turn deserves another. That is my opinion, mother ; and though I am young—most people would call me a tall child—I do believe it is just common sense."

" And so it is, dear. I am afraid I am what is called '*morbid*' ! The other night when Mrs. Russell was reading to us that beautiful poem, 'The Lord of Burleigh,'—and she read it beautifully, too—it seemed, in a great measure, my own experience. And they ring in my ears, those pathetic lines :—

" But a trouble weighed upon her,
And perplexed her night and morn,
With the burthen of an honour
Unto which she was not born.

Faint she grew, and even fainter,
As she murmur'd, 'Oh, that he
Were once more that landscape-painter,
Which did win my heart from me !'
So she drooped and drooped before him,
Fading slowly from his side."

Catherine did not finish the quotation, but Anne remembered that it was, "Then before her time she died!" When the actual parting came, the girl's last whispered words were, "Mother sweet! if you should want me—downright want me—write and say so, and *I'll come!* I'll come on my own hook. I will always keep by me enough money for the home journey, and if I heard from you, and your letter said, 'I want my girl,' I should pack up my big bag, and walk out of the house, without saying a word to anybody. And once away, I think I would not be caught till I got to dear old Hackney. Good-bye, sweetest and best of mothers!" And with these words in her ears, Catherine went back to England, and once more recommenced her life at Ivyside.

CHAPTER XX.

ROBERT SETS UP HIS CARRIAGE.

AFTER all, Anne did come home at Christmas, though only for three weeks; she was so persistent that her father could not refuse her, especially as it appeared that she could accompany one of the governesses, who was leaving France for a few months' sojourn in England. At length, Catherine had the supreme pleasure of preparing her daughter's room for occupation, and all the pretty things that had been put away so sorrowfully six months before were once more brought to the light, and arranged with that loving care and simple taste which were among

Mrs. Wreford's womanly characteristics. And this time there was no disappointment ; Anne reached Charing Cross on the appointed day, and her train was punctual, almost to the minute.

Eagerly she looked out as it slowly entered the station, hoping, yet scarcely expecting, to see her mother on the platform. Catherine was not there, but Robert was, and in three minutes Anne had all her belongings in readiness for the final stage of the long, cold journey. She looked across to the cab-rank, wondering that her father had not already engaged a conveyance, and at the same instant saw the porter handing up her portmanteau to the driving-box of a handsome close-carriage. "Oh stop !" she cried, hastily ; "that is wrong ; a cab, please."

"It is right," said Robert, taking her hand-bag and wrappers, and flinging them on to the back seat of the same commodious vehicle ; "jump in ; I want to get home ; I was ten minutes too early, and the wind blows up so keenly from the river. Home, Jobson, as fast as you can ! But don't forget to call in Ludgate Hill for those parcels." And in another minute Mr. and Miss Wreford were snugly shut in, and the spirited horses were impatiently making their way into the crowded Strand.

"Well, Anne !" said Robert, as they passed Somerset House, "and what sort of a passage did you have ?"

"A very good one, father—I mean, papa ! The Straits were misty, but calm, and it was not so cold as I expected to find it."

"You left Madame all right, I suppose ?"

"Oh, yes ! She sent for me when your letter arrived, and was extremely gracious and condescending. She only regretted that I should not be in Paris for the *jour de l'an*, and for the *fête des rois*."

"It was a great pity to lose them ; but you were so perverse, you would come, and ma seemed to have set her heart on having you for Christmas, and I was weak-minded enough to yield ; and so you are here, instead of in the *Maison de la Tour*, where you ought to be learning your lessons, like a good, industrious little girl."

"I have worked hard, papa, ever since you left me in

September, and when I return I mean to make up for lost time ; I am much obliged to you for letting me come home ; I do so want to see mother again—and everybody ! And you have not told me how mother is ! ”

“ Well, Anne, I cannot say she is quite the thing ! Indeed, she has not been quite the thing all this year. That heavy attack of influenza last January so prostrated her that she has never really regained her strength ; and now she has taken cold again—she always is taking cold, somehow ! She persisted in going to chapel last Sunday in the fog, and next morning she was ever so feverish. When I got home at night she had gone to bed with bad headache. But I believe she would have been insane enough to come to meet you to-day had I not at breakfast-time put my veto upon it. Women are so inconsistent ; one day they are afraid to let the softest air blow upon them, the next day they go out in hail and snow, and rain and whirlwind.”

“ It does not much matter what the weather is, driving in this comfortable, snug carriage. It is not yours, is it, papa ? ”

“ Whose should it be ? It does not look like a hired turn-out, I hope ? ”

“ Not at all ; but I did not know you had set up your carriage.”

“ That is a vulgar phrase. I wonder your mamma did not tell you, for I bought this brougham a fortnight after our return from France, and I bought it more on your mamma's account than on my own, let me tell you.”

“ Is it a *brougham* ? ”

“ A double-brougham, and an unusually roomy and comfortable one. It ought to be a good one though, for it cost a pretty penny, and horses are terribly expensive animals to keep, to say nothing of the coachman and a host of incidental expenses that are for ever cropping up. I had some thought of a landau, but finally decided in favour of a really A 1 brougham. Next summer, I may, perhaps, indulge me with a barouche—a nice open carriage, you know, with a large hood that can be put up or down as occasion requires—with C springs, of course. I saw the very thing in Long Acre last week, and I had

more than half a mind to secure it on the spot; but I thought I would wait, and see how Jobson and the horses got on. Besides, an open carriage is not of much use in winter."

"Papa," said Anne, solemnly, "you must be very rich?"

"No, I am not; but I mean to be some day, my dear. I mean to be a *millionaire*! Why, Anne! I am already making twice as much of the business as Mr. Hankins and Mr. Bright ever did. And money must be spent—judiciously spent, of course—in order to increase it. Mere saving defeats its own ends; savers and scrapers are always penny-wise and pound foolish. Not but what saving up to a certain point is to be commended; it may be essential, as was my own case in early life. But I hoarded in order that I might have something to work with. There is a homely old saying that 'Money breeds money,' and it is quite true. Save with a purpose; if you do not, you may almost as well be a spendthrift. Mere hoards generally come to grief. Save always with a definite end in view, and never undertake unprofitable work. Remember, too, that time is money! I knew a man in Market Worbridge, Anne, who was always saving up pence and shillings till they came to sovereigns. His father had done it before him. I think his main idea was to have something in keeping for a rainy day."

"And was not that a very good idea?"

"A good idea as far as it went, and no farther! The rainy-day came, of course, and equally of course the reserve fund melted and melted away into nothing. But it went on raining month after month, and year after year. If the man had only devoted himself to *getting* instead of saving, he might have been now in comfortable circumstances; as it was, he saved and saved—saved always, and *died in poverty*. That man was a caution to me. I was only a lad, but I determined never to do work that did not pay—that did not pay, Anne! I saw that one's savings were only the fulcrum upon which the lever of one's fortunes might rest. I saw that a wise expenditure might be more truly economical than rigid, uncompromising parsimony; I learned, I think, to marry

'waste not, want not,' to 'nothing venture, nothing have.'"

"Yes, papa," returned Anne, demurely. But she did not understand ; she seemed to be listening with all respect to the paternal oracle, while she was really looking out into the familiar London streets, and at the same time wondering how much a "double-brougham" and a pair of handsome, well-actioned bays might cost. And, above all, she was thinking of the joy so close at hand—the joy of soon being in her own dear mother's arms. Robert, because his daughter was grave and womanly, frequently forgot her actual years, and talked over her head. He did so in the present instance. Every minute they were drawing nearer home, and Anne quite appreciated the speed at which they travelled. "A cab would have taken half as long again," she said to herself, as she caught sight of the Hackney Triangle. "I shall have, at least, twenty minutes more of mother's society than I should have had if we had come in a lumbering cab. Yes ! I have no objection to father's keeping his carriage, and it must be nice for mother ; she need never go into the mud and wet again ; she must like it, I should imagine."

A very little longer, and mother and child had met. Catherine looked her very best when once more she had her daughter with her in the house. Anne could not help saying, "Why, mother dear ! you look so much better than I had hoped to find you. You have quite a colour, and your eyes are bright, and talking does not tire you ; that new doctor has done you good."

"You have done me good, darling," was the answer ; "you are better than any doctor. To see you at home again is worth all the tonics in the world. I have no faith in iron and quinine ; and I take my three glasses of port a day with all manner of grimaces, and a secret contempt for the prescription."

Those three weeks passed rapidly away. There were many things in the new *ménage* of which Anne cordially approved ; there were some which excited her displeasure. She had the wisdom to hold her tongue, but she felt in her own mind that the one thing that put so many others "out of joint," as it were, was the supreme fact that her

mother was not sufficiently mistress of her own house. The cook was undoubtedly housekeeper, and the grand parlour-maid did exactly what seemed good in her own eyes. And Mrs. Russell, who was very much at Ivyside, appeared to exercise a subtle and unseen influence over the whole family. Anne could not but admire, though she strove in vain to like, her.

She had come to live very near the Wrefords, and there was scarcely a day in which she did not visit Ivyside—which, however, was by no means the Ivyside of old, for all the principal rooms had been tastefully refurnished—as Catherine observed—regardless of expense. There was no fault to find with the beautiful widow's demeanour toward Catherine. She was careful never to take undue liberties, and she often shrank back when too freely importuned by Robert to make any move towards the initiative. She would take any amount of trouble to save Catherine worry or fatigue, and she really knew so well how to act in an emergency, and she was so entirely *au fait* in those very particulars which were so often terrible pitfalls and stumbling-blocks to poor, unambitious Catherine, that it came to be quite a regular thing to consult Mrs. Russell whenever any difficulty, great or small, arose, and whenever any sort of event, ordinary or extraordinary, was impending. Mrs. Russell knew exactly what to do and what to leave undone; what to affect and what to avoid. She was no mere slave to fashion, yet she never transgressed any rational law of etiquette; her instincts were all aristocratic, her tastes refined; a few graceful touches of hers were worth the hired labours of half-a-dozen serving-men; she never offended, nor could she be accused of flattery generally; there was no shallowness about her, and no pretence, so far as outside attributes were concerned. She was really all she claimed to be, and she wrote herself down a woman of the world, while at the same time she practised many Christian virtues and exercised many Christian charities—such as Christian people sometimes seem either to forget or to make of small account.

"She is really very kind," said Anne, when she was making preparations for her return. "When I see how

kind she is to you, mother dear, I feel ashamed of myself for not liking her more thoroughly. I wonder how it is that we fall in love with some people whether we will or not, and fail to love others, even though we try. It is very curious."

" You know the old rhyme—

" 'I do not like you, Dr. Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell.'

There always have been, and always will be, Dr. Fells while the world lasts. And liking and loving somehow do not go by merit."

" I know they don't, though I suppose they ought. I am sure I would love Mrs. Russell if I could, for father is so fond of her, and so are you—are you not, mother dear ? "

" Not exactly fond," replied Catherine, slowly ; " but I thoroughly appreciate her, and I know it is all my own fault that we do not draw more closely together as the intimacy increases. And it really is a relief to have her to fall back upon when I am at my wits' ends to know how to arrange for some entertainment or other."

" People generally admire her, do they not ? "

" They admire her, but I am not sure that they *take* to her. I sometimes think she is too brilliant for common-place people such as we are—excepting, of course, your father, who likes nothing that is dull and prosy."

" What a difference there is in our way of living since this time last year ! To think that we keep our carriage, as people say."

" Yes ; and I remember when—a very few years ago—we did not feel rich enough to buy a perambulator. It is all like a dream, Anne. I cannot always believe that it is real."

" It is, though, is it not ? "

" I have no doubt of it. Your father is not one to delude himself or others by false show. But I cannot understand it ; of course, it all comes of the money and the business left him by Mr. Bright."

" Mr. Bright must have respected father very much ? "

" I am sure he did ; and so does old Mr. Hankins, who

is, however, a mere cipher in Fenchurch Street, and scarcely ever makes his appearance there. In fact, he has withdrawn from all active concern in the business, and is now what they call a sleeping or silent partner only."

"That is, a partner who simply has a share in the risk and in the profits, but none in the work?"

"Exactly. So that your father is now the sole authority and head of the firm; 'Bright and Hankins' existing only in name."

"How much did Mr. Bright leave father?—how much money, I mean!"

"I have not the least idea; your father never told me; I know no more than you do, Anne. In fact, I have come to believe that from the very first I have known but partially my husband's affairs. He never would tell me what our income really was; he would only say how much I might spend yearly, and, till within the last year or two, he has allowed me only just enough to make both ends meet. Up to a certain period, he was always insisting on the strictest economy, which, indeed, I did my best to practise, having been trained from childhood to make the best of every sixpence. I was always told that I had my own living to get; and when your father and I were first engaged, he was a poor lad, living in humble lodgings, and denying himself every superfluity that he might keep out of debt, and have a pound or two laid by in case of accident or sickness. And when we married, we thought ourselves immensely rich folks with a hundred and fifty pounds a-year, and a nice little sum in hand for furnishing and extra expenses. Knowing your father's thrifty ways and business talents, I thought he might presently occupy a much better position in Fenchurch Street, or, perhaps, set up in a small way for himself; for he always had a great aversion to depending upon a fixed salary; he had no patience, he used to say, with an unelastic income, for your requirements and your desires would stretch, whether your means did so or not."

"I think he was right; I see that it must be better to have something of one's own, which can be increased—to have small resources, which can be developed, as I heard

father saying to Philip Rutland once—than to have a fixed income for life, which can never be exceeded. And father said he would rather have £5,000 for capital to do as he liked with than several thousands a year, which must always be the same."

"He talks about thousands now quite naturally; in the days of which I speak we could not count upon hundreds. I can only repeat that it seems to me a dream—a romance—in which, most unexpectedly, I am called to play my part. I feel sometimes as if I were a woman in a story-book."

"How very odd! But you like it, don't you, mother? It must be good to have plenty of money, and to be able to afford the best of everything. I should not like to go back to that old time when I had to wear a frock a certain time, and when you had to make your summer bonnets last two seasons, and, worst of all, when we kept only one dull, pottering servant-girl, who was never fit to answer the door, and who would as soon have thought of sweeping the chimneys as of waiting at table. What would father say to me *now*, if I jumped up from my seat to fetch the bread, or an extra spoon or fork, or if you brought in a dish from the kitchen with your own hands?—as we have done hundreds of times—as you know, mother."

"As we have done hundreds of times, and as we may do again. Mind, I only say *may*! It does not seem likely, but who can tell?"

"I hope it will never be, and yet—we were very snug in those dear old times. And though we made no display, we were quite *respectable*."

"Quite! But respectability has nothing to do with show and grandeur. A petty shopkeeper, who pays his way, and does his duty by his family, is far more respectable than a nobleman whose reckless extravagance brings him into difficulties. It is better to be respectable than rich, if one cannot be both."

"But one can be both, surely?"

"Undoubtedly. I did not mean to hint that it was otherwise. I was only thinking how completely separated respectability and affluence might be, and in these days

of shams and competition too often are. It is only God-fearing people who are truly respectable."

"But to come back to the carriage, mother; you like it, don't you?"

"Of course I do; there is no harm in appreciating luxuries when we have really earned a right to enjoy them, as I truly believe we have—that is to say, your father has. If I had been the sole bread-winner, I am afraid we should still be in the little old house in Oliver Street, waiting upon ourselves, a yearly tea-meeting at the chapel our greatest dissipation, and omnibus fares a serious consideration!"

"I don't know that. At any rate, mother, you did your part—your woman's part, at least. And you did earn money when it was most needed. I am sure you deserve all you have, quite as much as father does. And if I were you I would just take all the comfort I could, and enjoy it thoroughly. It seems real enough, and so I, for my part, shall be content. And you know, mother, discontent is wrong and foolish; you have always taught me to be satisfied with my lot; and having been satisfied with hard work and thrift, it is only right that now we should be equally content with ease and plenty—you, especially, who are not so strong as you used to be."

"My weakness reconciles me to many doubtful luxuries Anne. But to think that I, poor Catherine Wreford, once Halliday, should come to drive about in my own close carriage! And there is poor Mrs. Mowbray, who was once my grandest customer, and born to the use of carriages, and the humble service of men and maids, going about on foot, and living in a poky house, with one poor, slatternly little servant! Truly, the world is full of ups and downs!"

"It is a great deal nicer to go up than to go down. And if it is true that people never do keep on a dead level, I am glad, very glad, that our way is up, and not down."

"So am I, dear. It must be dreadful to sink and sink in spite of all one's striving—to be what the world calls unlucky, or, rather, unprosperous. Let us thank God, my Anne, who has blessed us in the labour of our hands,

and given us so much richly to enjoy. And remember, my darling—remember in the days to come, when you have wealth at your command, and when I am no longer here, that you are only as a steward in all these things; that the richer and higher you are, the greater your responsibility; that one day, sooner or later, you must give account to the Master of the way in which you have used His gracious gifts—for great or small, dear, all is from *His* hand. When that day comes, my child, may the dear Lord say to you, with smiling countenance, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant !’”

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PROJECTED DINNER-PARTY.

ANNE went back to Paris, and the Wrefords went on from week to week, and from month to month, in the course upon which, by will of the head of the family, they had entered. Catherine's duties multiplied continually; her circle increased, her visiting list grew longer and longer, and by-and-by came the period when it was expedient that her “evenings” should be once more commenced. Robert worked harder than ever, and seemed to have little thought of anything in which Fenchurch Street was not included; and Catherine often wondered how it was that he cared so much to give parties and accept formal invitations, and perform generally what he rather grandiloquently called “his duties to society,” when he evidently derived from them but the minimum of personal gratification. Catherine had better understood the plodding, cautious, self-denying Robert of twenty years ago than the far-seeing, scheming, subtly-ambitious Robert of to-day; and therefore it was that sometimes—weakly and

morbidly it must be confessed—she longed wearily for the quiet though toilsome obscurity of earlier times. How she wished he would be content without regular “receptions ;” how much she dreaded these “evenings,” which had always been a burden to her, and in the entire success of which she could never be brought honestly to believe. She looked forward, however, hopefully to the assistance of Philip Rutland, and to resuming her intercourse with her own friend, Mrs. Markham. She always thought of this lady as her own friend ; Mrs. Russell was rather Robert’s friend than hers. Of Mrs. Rayner she had not for many months seen as much as she desired ; the fact being, that Ada Rayner was not rich, and had a large family of babies and growing-up boys and girls, and frequently had, as her husband expressed it, “other fish to fry” than to dance attendance at Mrs. Wreford’s fashionable *soirées*. Still, when Ada and Catherine did meet, they greatly enjoyed each other’s society.

The season that year was early and brilliant, and the tide of fashionable life, though at its height only at the West End, flowed far and wide, influencing even the languid current of Hackney society. Never had Ivyside been so gay ! Never had Robert and Catherine been so little alone together ; never had they approached so nearly to the *beau ideal* of a fashionable couple, who, without the smallest approach to actual disagreement, were still virtually apart, if not partially estranged. And yet Robert flattered himself that at last his wife was beginning to comprehend the career which he had planned for her ; that she was—“better late than never”—beginning to enter into the spirit which inspired himself in his pursuit of position and success. Her health, it was true, did not improve satisfactorily ; but then the health of ladies in society was proverbially delicate, and it did not appear that there was anything at all serious in her case. She was far from strong ; her appetite was fastidious ; she was languid in the morning and feverish at night—but the fever brought with it a certain brilliance and a fictitious energy which might deceive one so little anxious and watchful as Robert Wreford. He seldom saw his wife

in the morning now ; for as she complained of sleepless nights, they agreed to occupy separate apartments. When they met in the evening, he was agreeably surprised to find her what he called " quite up to the mark ! " sparkling, blooming with almost the vivacity of girlhood. He could only suppose that she was falling into his plans with most delightful alacrity ; henceforth, all would go on exactly as he wished. A great deal of Catherine's adaptation to his ways he attributed to the influence of Mrs. Russell, who saved her friends, both of them, an infinitude of trouble in innumerable instances.

" But for Mrs. Russell," said Catherine to Mrs. Markham, " I must have given in, or, as the Americans would phrase it, given *out*, long ago."

" I am not sure," replied Mrs. Markham, " but that it would have been the *wiser* policy to give in, or give out if you like, some time ago ! You are not getting strength, and you are thinner every time I see you. It is not the actual *doing* that wears out a woman in your position ; of course, you need do nothing with your own hands, save arrange flowers, and dispose ornaments, and give finishing touches—which are beyond the genius of nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand servants ; it is the anxiety, the responsibility, the inevitable arrangement, which burdens you, both in body and in mind. You want repose ; as soon as the hot weather sets in you ought to go the seaside, and give yourself up to unmitigated laziness. You would come back for the winter campaign as fresh as a daisy."

" I dare say we shall go somewhere in August or September ; on the Continent, probably. Well ! I confess I am tired, nearly always ; I am afraid I am longing for that unwholesome state of being which, according to Dr. Watts, would induce Satan to find me some employment. I wish you would just look over this *menu* with me ; it has been sent up for approval, and must be decided on immediately. It is for Wednesday fortnight—our grand field-day, when we hope to see you and the Misses Rutland, and Mr. Philip, of course. I suppose it is of no use to ask Mr. Rutland senior ? "

" Of no use at all ; it would scarcely be to pass the

compliment, inasmuch as he has long given it out that he visits only in the most friendly and unceremonious way. If Mr. Wreford asked him to 'drop in' to-morrow when you are alone and eat a slice of mutton, or to smoke some of his choice tobacco, and try some newly-imported wine, and talk finance or politics, he would very likely accept. But make one of a gay crowd he never will again; he leaves all that sort of thing to Philip and the girls, he says, and to myself, if at my age I am foolish enough to go in for fashionable gaieties. Only, as I tell him, the girls cannot go out alone, and it is not fair to deny them their natural advantages. I wish Philip would marry; I should at once turn over to his wife all the duties of chaperonage."

"Philip ought to marry; he is by far the nicest, most reliable young man I know. He would prove an excellent husband, I am sure."

"My only consolation is that he will know better now what he actually wants than if he had stumbled into some boyish engagement before he attained his majority. He is more likely to make a wise selection any time during the next ten years than in past time."

"Much more likely," returned Catherine, with a sigh. She was thinking, poor soul, in her humility, how much better Robert might have done had he deferred matrimonial engagements for a few years, till he saw his way clear to propose, not to a poor dressmaker, but to some educated lady, who would be equal to the duties of wife to an eminently successful and aspiring man.

"There is something to be said on both sides, though," resumed Mrs. Markham. "It all depends upon the man himself; some men develop early, and know intuitively the sort of woman they actually need; the pair come early together, and mutually acting upon each other grow together in mind and feeling as the years pass away, and are moderately happy, which is perhaps, after all, the safest kind of happiness in this world. Others seem not to come to full manhood till almost middle age, and only then find the second self, whom they have vaguely sought before. And to this class of man my nephew Philip, I sometimes think, belongs. Mediocrity in marriage would never

satisfy him, and it would be such a terrible thing if ever he were to awake to the fact that, all unwittingly, he had made an irretrievable mistake."

"It would, indeed. But such mistakes are often—too often—made. Can they never be unmade? Can the wrong never be remedied?"

"The very question that Agnes, referring to the unhappy marriage of one of her school friends, asked me the other day. I said I thought all might turn out well if both were unselfish, religious persons. That the step being irrevocable, it remained only to make the best of it, that no good would ever come of fighting against existing bonds, and chafing at fetters which only death or sin could rive asunder. People who begin badly need not end so, I am convinced—the determination to do right, by God's help, under any circumstances, often leads to unexpected happiness. I knew a woman once who, having, as she believed, made the sad mistake of marrying an utterly unsuitable person, gave way first to despondency, and then to rebellion, and was ultimately on the brink of what might have led to ruin, when Providence mercifully arrested her in her mad career, and sent her a friend who saved her from herself, and showed her the only means of escape from the misery which threatened to engulf both her husband and herself. Years afterwards she told me the story herself; she found that the mistake was no longer there; life was nearly over, and looking back on her history, which at one time seemed so deeply overshadowed, she was almost amazed to find how happy she had been for many years. 'If now,' she said to me, 'I could choose from all the men I know, or ever have known, my own husband would be my deliberate choice, though thirty years ago I was wickedly on the point of leaving him. If I had done so, I should have indeed committed an irretrievable mistake, not only in the world's estimation, but in my own.' The fact was, she had bravely done her duty, accepting the inevitable as God's will, till at last, in simply striving after the right, she found all, and more than all, the happiness which she imagined she had missed in her wilful, impulsive youth. True it is,—

“ ‘ Curved is the line of Beauty,
Straight is the line of Duty;
Walk in the last, and thou shalt see
The other ever follow thee.’

But we are forgetting your *menu* all this time ; Philip may well laugh at me for a moralising, sermonising old woman ! Let me see ! where are my glasses ? I should think it will do very well, only I would have *printanière*, instead of white soup, and lobster cutlets instead of lobsters *à la Tartare* ; and don’t forget Mr. Wreford’s little weakness for angelica. This is to be a very grand affair indeed, I suppose ? ”

“ Wonderfully so ; but I shall try not to worry myself about it. When I have decided upon the *menu*, I have no more to do ; the proper people will manage all the rest, and Mrs. Russell has promised to look after the decorations. I think I have made up my mind to take my life easily, Mrs. Markham.”

“ I am very glad to hear it ; there is no reason why you should not, I am sure. I dare say many of your friends envy you exceedingly ? ”

“ I have much to be thankful for,” said Catherine, evasively ; to no one but Anne could she speak freely of her weariness and her distaste for the life of pleasure forced upon her.

That was a very hot summer—such a summer as we sigh for when cold winds and chilly rains prevail from May day to Michaelmas ; but a summer such as few of us are quite satisfied with when it really comes in all its torrid fury. The thermometer stood at 90° in the shade, people told each other in despair ; ice and cooling drinks were at a premium, gentlemen wore the lightest suits their tailors could devise, while ladies fanned themselves and gasped in the most diaphanous of muslins. Irritable Anglo-Indians declared that Calcutta was not nearly so unendurable as London, and cried aloud for tatties and punkahs, which, of course, were not forthcoming. Seaside lodgings and marine hotels ran up their prices, tourist tickets were in universal demand, the streets of the metropolis became more and more unsavoury, and the annual exodus to the coast and to the Continent commenced a full fortnight

before the proper period; everybody who could leave town was either gone or going, and those who could not sadly bewailed their melancholy fate.

The Wrefords had planned a journey to the German Baths, but, owing to business entanglements, they were not leaving London till quite the end of August. They were going through France, that they might take up Anne, who, of course, was full of delight at the prospect of the trip, and she had privately resolved to try and persuade her parents—and Mrs. Russell, who was still their inseparable companion—to go a little further and explore the Tyrol, where she would be sure to meet her great friend Marguerite D'Anville.

As the heat increased, so did Catherine's weakness and lassitude, though still she declared that nothing really ailed her; she was not conscious of any complaint save a universal weakness and languor, and latterly a total loss of appetite. It was now the beginning of August, and Robert had decided upon giving his last grand dinner-party on the 10th, before some of his friends left London for the moors. But that he had never handled a gun in his life, and was nervously afraid of powder and stray shots, he would certainly have joined the sportsmen on the 12th.

He had been pressed to go with one particular party, but prudence bade him decline; and, as a set-off against his refusal, he had asked all who were still disengaged to dine together at Ivyside on one particular evening. At first it was to be a very simple, every-day repast—just the usual bill of fare, with one or two superadded dishes; then other persons were invited, several of them supposed to be very important and influential characters, and the *menu* had to be reconsidered, and fresh instructions given, till at length the “quiet little dinner” to which the first guests had been asked became a heavy, formal, expensive, prospective banquet.

Robert was more than usually anxious that all should go off well. He wished the dinner to be a thorough success, and he knew perfectly that several of the invited guests were very decided epicures, not to say gourmands, and very much given to criticise the entertainment they

received. Of one of them especially—a City knight—he stood in awe, and almost regretted, when too late, that he had exposed himself and his establishment to the invidious criticisms of Sir Jonas and Lady Stubbs. He was not in good temper, either ; the hot weather disagreed with him as well as with other people ; and all sorts of matters had gone contrariwise in Fenchurch Street, and made him, as his worried clerks affirmed, as savage as a Tartar ! And what the clerks in Fenchurch Street said of their respected chief, the servants at Ivyside echoed, with variations, of their master ; for Robert really was nearly as cross as he could be, and he found fault with everything and everybody, and fumed and fretted and grumbled continually, and was certain that the wonderful dinner-party, on which so much trouble and cost were expended, would be an utter failure.

How harassed Catherine felt needs not to be told, for she was the target at which all Robert's sharpest arrows were really aimed ; the servants' blunders were all her fault ; the tradesmen's stupidity was the result of her inactivity and carelessness about results ; and really an unprecedented number of things did go strangely wrong ; and, to crown all, Mrs. Russell was at Scarborough, and would not return till it was time to make preparations for the Continental journey.

It still wanted two days of the 10th, and Robert's temper was worse than ever. He came home to a late dinner, spoiled partly through such misfortunes as will happen in the best-regulated households—especially in the dog-days—and partly through his own unpunctuality. Undoubtedly, too, he was a little bilious, and biliousness always made him furiously unreasonable ; so when he had sent away his plate again and again, with a sharp message to the cook, and a tart reprimand to the servant, who inadvertently jarred the crockery as she removed it, and found himself still at fever-heat, and quite unrelieved in spirit, he began to pour out the vials of his wrath on the head of that safe scapegoat—his wife. If he went and scolded the cook, that inestimable woman would at once give notice ; if he further reproved the parlour-maid, she would follow suit ; if he spoke his mind to the butcher or

to the fishmonger, he would probably receive a little more abuse than he was quite prepared for ; decidedly, the only and safest course was to worry his wife, who would neither give notice, nor return his compliments in equal coin, nor decline any further dealings with him. Robert would not have confessed to the unkind impeachment, but he frequently behaved as if a man's lawful wife were the butt at which he might lawfully aim his worst spites and nastiest tempers, on whom he might vent the natural acerbity of his disposition, and so restore himself to his wonted equanimity.

“Really, Catherine !” he began, even before they were alone ; “I should think ours is the worst-managed household in civilised London !”

Catherine made no reply. What reply could she make to an infuriated, utterly unreasonable man, on whom the soft answer that, commonly speaking, turns away wrath was ineffectual ? And her silence finished his temper completely.

“Yes !” he continued, quietly enough as to voice and manner, but at a white heat internally ; “it is as I say. Nothing is attended to ; nothing is cared for. Is not this dinner that we have *not* eaten a disgrace to you—to *you*, I say, the mistress of the house ? Servants are but secondary offenders ! And there you sit quite tranquil and self-possessed, not even taking the trouble to excuse yourself.”

“I should excuse myself in vain, Robert. Nothing that I could at this moment say would tend to modify your anger. You are put out—perhaps, you are not well ; the City must be very trying in this burning weather.”

“I am not put out. I am justly offended. Nor is it of to-day's negligence alone that I complain. The day after to-morrow our grand dinner comes off, and I feel certain that it will be a grand failure ! And you—you care nothing that I should be annoyed, disgraced, made to look like a fool at my own table ! Should things go as I am but too sure they will, I shall hold you responsible—mind ! I give you *carte-blanche* ; spend what you think proper ; multiply attendance if you choose ; but hold

yourself responsible! Set your wits to work, for once, and condescend to please your husband."

"Robert," said Catherine, trying to speak steadily, "you are very unkind; you are cruel! I have done—I am doing—all I can, but I am nearly powerless. Cannot you see that the worry, the incessant pressure of duties that I am unequal to performing, is wearing my very life away?"

"I can see that you surrender *yourself* to passive inactivity. Of course, we all feel this weather, but because the mercury stands unwontedly high, is daily life to be suspended? We cannot lie down and sleep till the air is cooler. Suppose I ceased to concern myself about business matters; suppose I let things go, careless of result, because I feel fatigue and lassitude, where should we all be? A very little of such selfish conduct on my part, and we should be—I scarcely know where, but *en route* for Basinghall Street, in all probability; and then what would become of you? and where would your dear daughter's prospects be? But women never think—never reflect; they imagine that effects can be produced without cause, that happy issues are worked out by lucky magic. They sit at their ease, giving, perhaps, a few contradictory orders, or trifling with a handful of flowers, and let things go exactly as they may. You *know* you have taken no interest in this party from the beginning. You *know* I have set my heart on its success, and it is our last entertainment for the season, and yet you have never really occupied yourself with the arrangements as a good wife should! You seem to me to have left the whole thing to chance."

"I have not left to chance anything which I could possibly control. I have attended to all that came within my observation, and I tell you once for all, Robert, *I can do no more*. You may scold me, taunt me, if you will, but I cannot achieve impossibilities. I cannot be a lady of fashion; I cannot take the head of your table as a woman born to affluence and position would. You once said I was 'not strong enough for the place!' It is quite true, Robert. I confess that I am not competent to the discharge of those duties which you require from me. I

have tried—God knows how hard I have tried!—to come up to your standard—and have failed. I was too old to be transplanted from middle-class to fashionable society; it is too late for me: some day you may have another wife who will please you better, and uphold your dignity; but she will never, I think, study your individual comfort as I have studied it, ever since we married."

"There! now you turn sentimental. There is no chance of my having another wife at present, so we will waive that alternative."

"Not just at present. But you may have one before long, if you desire it."

"Are you urging me to commit bigamy?"

"Robert, you will not understand me. But this I say—call it sentiment or what you please—my days are numbered. You said this was our last entertainment for the season—it will be my last on earth, then."

"Nonsense! Women always fancy they are going to die if they are out of health at all. I suppose you are making *post-mortem* arrangements, as you refer to your successor?"

"I am! I know, and I have known for some months, that I am slowly dying."

Robert began to laugh. "We are all doing that, I suppose; and I think the process will be no more speedy in your case than in my own. Catherine, this is a very foolish and unprofitable conversation; I propose that we should bring it to a conclusion. If I am cross, you have made me so; you are enough to provoke a stone, sitting there with your white face and your tearful eyes and the air of a martyr. There is nothing more exasperating than meekness, when one is longing for a little demonstration of energy, especially when that meekness is to some extent *assumed!*" And Robert looked severely at his wife, as though he would say, "You see I am not to be trifled with."

"Very well," she replied quietly, so quietly that she seemed hardly to know what she was saying.

"And pray make an effort," he continued. "Exert yourself for once; after the 10th you may go to bed for a whole week, if you like, and only wake up

when the day comes to set off for Germany. In the meantime, interest yourself in my affairs just a little. How about the dessert?"

"It is ordered."

"You had better drive to the West End yourself tomorrow. You can select most of the fruits—pine-apples, melons, peaches, and such like. They need not all be sent in till the next day; and there are fifty things you might see to, if you would only take the trouble. The very fact of your presence would act as a spur to those lagging, time-serving tradesmen; it would show them that we are not to be put off with anything inferior. You will be none the worse for the drive, and now that you have your comfortable brougham a little invalidism need be no hindrance. Dear me! I thought ladies liked shopping when they could step in and out of a carriage of their own, and spend any reasonable amount of money!"

Then, fortunately for Catherine, some one wanted to speak to Mr. Wreford, and he went away, or else he might have discoursed till midnight. It was getting late, so she went at once to her own room, and, feeling too tired to undress, rang the bell for Jane, who thought she had never seen her mistress look so ill and lifeless.

"This hot weather is just killing her," she said to one of her fellow-servants, as they sat over the well-spread supper-table. "She's that delicate she didn't ought to be troubled with giving parties; and master's temper is as fiery as the weather. If I was missis, I'd *strike*—that I would!"

Next morning Catherine prepared to obey her husband's injunctions, and drive to the West End in pursuit of pine-apples, melons, &c. It was hotter than ever, and Jobson grumbled a little when he received his orders, and remarked that it wasn't "fit for horses, much less for men, going such a distance under such a broiling sun." But the carriage came round at the appointed hour in spite of all his displeasure. It was late in the afternoon when he returned, bringing home his mistress, looking, as her servants afterwards declared, more dead than alive. She seemed to grope her way upstairs like a blind person, and when Jane hurried in with a cup of tea in her hand she

was lying on the bed insensible. They treated her for a fainting fit, but she did not revive, though every remedy was used; and at length the frightened maids sent off for Dr. Rayner.

When Robert came home that evening, rather earlier than usual, and with his temper much relieved by last night's ebullition, he was met by the Doctor, who, with serious countenance, told him that Mrs. Wreford was very ill.

"Nothing of any consequence, I suppose? The weather, eh?" said Robert, feeling a little uncomfortable, as he remembered the white and weary face he had seen last at the end of the dinner-table almost twenty-four hours before.

"I regret to say that it is serious," replied Dr. Rayner, still more gravely. "This, I feel sure—I cannot doubt it—is the commencement of a long and severe illness, which, for many weeks, has been impending. She must be kept perfectly quiet, and I will at once send in a trustworthy nurse. Let the servants understand that the house must be as still as death. Her only chance is quiet, undisturbed repose."

"And we have a dinner-party to-morrow evening of more than twenty people!" gasped Robert, in extreme dismay.

"It cannot take place," was all the answer Dr. Rayner vouchsafed.

CHAPTER XXII.

"NEVERMORE."

YES! the dinner-party must be postponed *sine die*; there was no doubt about that. Dr. Rayner went his way, having done all that he could do for his patient, at the same time declaring his intention of returning later in the

evening. Robert rushed after him as he was on the door-step, imploring him to come back and explain it all. The answer he received was this:—"I cannot explain; you can see for yourself. You know the old proverb about the last straw that breaks the camel's back? This inopportune," the Doctor was going to say "*accursed*," for he was very angry—"this inopportune dinner-party has evidently been that last straw—that and the hot weather combined. You must have perceived that Mrs. Wreford has never been herself since that illness she had soon after little Anne was sent away to school. No! I cannot stay a moment longer. I must see a patient at Dalston immediately, and there are several cases besides that must be attended to. I will look in again, certainly, though it may be very late; and you shall have a nurse that I can trust before the evening closes in. I know where to lay my hand upon the very person. Pray don't delay me. I ought to be in Queen's Road now."

And Dr. Rayner dashed across the garden to his carriage, leaving Robert dumbfounded and conscience-stricken on the threshold of his house. "The last straw! That inopportune dinner-party!" he muttered to himself as he drew back into the hall. And he remembered how cross he had been the night before, and how he had worried his pale, weary-looking wife about this same "inopportune dinner-party." He went softly upstairs, for he had been told that Catherine's only chance lay in perfect quiet. He was half afraid of what might greet him, and yet anxious to know the worst. His first idea was that there had been much ado about little more than nothing, for Catherine lay so still, and, except for her exceeding pallor, looked much as usual. She appeared to be in a very deep sleep, or—as he looked more closely at the colourless, worn face—was it really insensibility? His fixed gaze seemed to exercise a mesmeric effect on the invalid, for she stirred, sighed, and finally opened her eyes and met his; but it was evident that he was not recognised. There was no consciousness in the almost vacant stare; the eyes were bright, but soulless; the action of the restless hands was purely mechanical.

"Catherine, Catherine, my dear! what is it?" he

asked, hoping that she might reply, and to some extent relieve the terrible apprehensions which were already crowding on his mind. She did not seem to hear him; he was not even sure that she saw him with those strange, expressionless, wide-open eyes; and again he addressed her, stroking her hair with a caressing fondness, very unlike his ordinary cold demeanour. "Catherine dearest! won't you speak?—just one word, love! to let me know that you understand. Do you not hear, my Catherine?"

Still no answer either by word or look. And now Jane interposed: "Please, sir, the Doctor did say as we were on no account to try to rouse her. He said no one must speak to her but the nurse, who would understand; and he would not answer for the consequences, if we let poor missis be disturbed. Don't you think you had better go down, sir? She don't know you any more than that picture does."

Never, in all her service, had Jane dared to say so much to the master, of whom she stood in wondrous awe; and Robert turned, almost as much astonished as if any dumb creature had taken him to task. His first impulse was to show his displeasure; but a moment's reflection told him that the girl was simply doing her duty, and that he was acting with a great deal of unwisdom. Only, he knew so very little about sickness—least of all, such incomprehensible illness as this appeared to him. Then he remembered that he had, as yet, heard nothing about the commencement of the attack. He had left her, or rather she had left him, tolerably well the evening previous, he told himself, for he had not seen her since; and he kept repeating the assertion to himself, as though desirous to be completely convinced that it was a simple truth, and no misstatement of his own. He turned again to the girl. "Jane, come down with me, and tell me all about it."

"Yes, sir! certainly, sir; but my mistress must not be left alone."

"Of course not. Go and fetch some one else while I watch here."

"Who shall I fetch? The other servants think 'tis

fever, and they won't come anear, though the Doctor says there's nothing to be afraid of."

"Nonsense! Fetch the one that is the least foolish, and tell her I desire her presence here. A pretty set of women I seem to have about me! Make haste!"

Jane went, and succeeded in persuading the under-housemaid to relieve guard for a few minutes in her mistress's chamber. She was willing enough to be questioned by her master, knowing that her answers would be far from agreeable to that gentleman, to whom she had many and many a time longed to speak her mind. So good an opportunity would probably never occur again, and she would not lose it of her own good will. Having brought her substitute, and installed her, with some warnings and instructions, she signified that she was ready to attend her master's pleasure. Robert led the way to the room called his study, and at once commenced his catechism. "What is the meaning of all this?" he demanded sternly, frowning upon his humble companion as though she were answerable for all that had transpired since he left Ivyside that morning.

"The matter is, sir," said Jane, dauntlessly, "that, *at last*, the missis has broken down! She has been giving way this long time, as anybody with half an eye might have seen, and now it is come to that, she can't hold on any longer."

"What do you mean by giving way?"

"I mean that her health has been failing for months, ever since you went away first to Paris, with Miss Anne, last January twelvemonth. She was worse than anybody knew but me and old cook, that went away last summer, for only we were with her; and old cook, she says to me, 'The missis has got a blow, Jane, and it's my opinion she'll never overget it.'"

"Never mind anybody's opinion. I want to hear *facts*, not to listen to mere notions. Of course, I know your mistress was ill then; she had severe influenza, and she was greatly weakened by it, as people in middle life often are, especially having it for the first time. But she recovered, and was all right during the summer and autumn, though the winter tried her again, no doubt."

"Begging your pardon, sir, she never was all right. She was not one to make a fuss about herself, but I could see a change steal over her week by week. She got well, I know, to a certain extent, but she was not the same; not what she was when first I came to be her servant. She was always being so tired, and then the new cook, and the others downstairs, worried her dreadful, and there was always parties and '*evenings*,' as having a lot of people is called; and she seemed as if she wanted rest and couldn't get it, and all this summer she has only just kept up. I knew she'd break down soon. I was as sure of it as that my name is Jane Jennings."

"Don't run on so. It is very easy when things come to pass to profess that you knew it all beforehand. What I wish to hear is, how this seizure came on; your mistress seemed much as usual last evening. This morning I had to be off by an earlier train than ordinary, and I did not go into her room, for fear of disturbing her."

"Well, sir, I don't know what you mean by 'much as usual.' I can only say I had to undress her last night; she rang for me soon after she went to her room, and that was just after dinner, and I found her as helpless as a baby, and that white she looked downright ghastly. I got her to bed, and I wanted to stay with her, but she would not let me. I loitered about though, upstairs, and once—when I had had my own supper—I stole very quietly into her room, lest I should disturb her, if she had fallen asleep."

"And was she asleep?"

"Not a bit of it! She was crying fit to break her heart."

"She was hysterical, no doubt. You ought to have told me; I should have made her take a little sal volatile or camphor, or something."

"No, sir; she was *not* hysterical—not a bit. I know hysterics well enough, for my last mistress but one used to have them dreadful whenever she was vexed or crossed in any way; and she'd *scream* that you might hear her two doors off. Deary me! what a work we servants had with her! for the moment she began screeching, master, he walked right out of the house, and wouldn't have nothing

to do with it. I've known him go off at ten o'clock at night, and not come back till all was quiet. But that's neither here nor there ; only, if anybody knows what real hysterics is, it's *me*, that always had the treatment of her. And poor missis's crying was quiet as could be ; but her sobs were terrible, as if they came from the bottom of her heart. I've known her cry in the same way many a time before."

"Indeed! I cannot think what she could have to cry for. You must be mistaken."

"No, sir ; by no means. She have cried oceans of tears, I should say, since Miss Anne went away to foreign parts. As to what she cried for, I don't pretend to say ; you must know a great deal better than me."

There was a quiet emphasis in Jane's tone which convinced Mr. Wreford that he was certainly accredited with his wife's tears—a significance of look and manner which told him quite as clearly as spoken words in what light he was regarded by his handmaiden, and probably by the whole staff of domestics. He did not, however, evince any resentment ; he only said, very calmly, "Go on with your story. Did you speak to your mistress when you found her weeping ?"

"No, sir ; I did not. It was not *my* place to take any notice ; I am only a servant. I longed to go in and comfort her up, if I could ; but it was not for *me* to do, as you must say yourself, sir. I hope I know my place."

"Was that the last you saw of your mistress ?"

"Yes ; I went to bed myself directly afterwards, for I felt quite poorly ; the day had been almost too hot to bear. I did not go near my mistress again till about half-past eight this morning, and then I took her her breakfast."

"Well ! and how did she seem then ?"

"Very badly. And what was most unusual with her, she said outright that she was very ill."

"Did she remain in bed ?"

"I wish she had ! I tried all I could to persuade her to lie still, and get another sleep, for I saw she had had one of her bad nights ; but it was of no use. Says she, 'I

must get up, Jane ; there's so many things to see to, and I promised your master I would drive to the West End about the dessert and other matters for to-morrow. If it were not for that dinner-party I would take your advice, and nurse myself all day.' And, says I, 'Bother the dinner-party, if you feel as ill as you look, ma'am ! You are no more fit to go to the West End than I am to go to China this blessed moment ; and if master only saw you I'm sure he wouldn't wish it, dinner-party or no dinner-party.' But she only sighed, and said she would rather make the effort ; perhaps she would be better when she was up. At any rate, '*I'll try !*' says she ; 'go and tell Jobson to have the carriage ready, and then come and help me to dress !' And when I had been down to Jobson and come back again, she had begun to dress herself, and had fainted like, not quite off, you understand, for she knew where she was ; but she was like death, and in a cold perspiration, for all the morning was that hot I could scarcely bear myself, and had eaten my own breakfast under the great mulberry tree, because the best kitchen felt like a Nebuchadnezzar's furnace."

"She did not go, surely ?"

"Oh, but she did ! I put a drop of brandy in her tea, and gave it her by spoonfuls, and presently she revived, and then I told her it was of no use, it was just killing herself to go out, and she must get into bed again, and I wanted to go or send for Dr. Rayner."

"What did she say ?"

"'Not yet,' said she ; 'he will have to come to me very soon, but not to-day, if I can keep up anyhow. If I can get over to-day and to-morrow I shall be satisfied. When the party is over I will go to bed, and stay there till—' and then she paused a bit, and gave a queer smile, that made her look more ghastly than ever, and she went on—'till they lift me out of it, to put me into my coffin ; for I feel the end is coming, Jane !'"

"What did you reply ?"

"Nothing, sir ; I was that shocked I couldn't speak, and all the more because I felt as if it would be as she said. But after awhile, I begged and prayed her, almost on my knees, to give up the journey to the West End,

and let me help her into bed again. It was all of no use, and presently she did brighten up a bit, and would do her back hair herself, while I got out her bonnet and mantle. Then when I saw she was bent on it, and couldn't be turned, I wanted to go with her; but that she would not permit, because there were a good many things to be done at home, and there was nobody she could trust like myself. When she was ready, and waiting for Johnson, she said, 'It was that brandy set me up, I believe; I will have a little more before I start. I know it is bad for my head, but it will help me through what I have to do. I don't believe in stimulants,' says she, 'but they give one strength for the time, and that is all I want.'"

"And did she take the brandy?"

"Yes, I gave it her myself; it was only in a wine-glass, and more than half water, and it did seem to do her good. But I felt afraid, because she had eaten nothing, and there was something unnatural in her look; and she said, just as she was going out of the dining-room, 'There! now I am wound up, I think, for a few hours. I shall run down afterwards, I know; all I want is to keep up just forty-eight hours longer!' She walked quite firmly to the carriage, and I watched it drive away, and then I said to cook, who had been up herself to speak with the mistress about some things that she wanted: 'What do you think of it, cook?' And cook she makes answer: 'I think, Jane, as missis looks more dead than alive. I only hope she'll come back all right, but my heart misgives me. This tiresome dinner-party, that's a perfect nuisance this weather, what with things not keeping and the fire roasting one to death, will never come off, for the missis is going to be awful ill, and she won't keep up many hours longer, you'll see! And I am sure,' says cook, 'I wish the party was at Hanover, that I do!'"

"And when your mistress came back?"

"She was late; it must have been five o'clock, I should think, when I saw the carriage turn in, and I ran to get her a cup of tea, straight off. Susan said she groped her way in, and upstairs, like a person walking in her sleep; and when I went up with the tea, in less than five

minutes, there she was, a-lying across the bed, with her bonnet on, in a dead faint, or what seemed like it. I called out, and Susan and Lucy came running up, and afterwards cook, and we did all we ever did before, and everything we had ever heard of, or could think of, and couldn't bring her round. And at last we sent off for Dr. Rayner, and luckily he was just come in to his dinner, and only stopped to snatch a mouthful and come on here. I never was so thankful in all my life to see any living man as I was to see him, a-walking into my poor missis's room!"

"What did he say—and do?"

"He didn't do much, only ordered her to be kept quite quiet, and told us to put a handkerchief soaked in cold gin-and-water to her head, and a hot bottle to her feet; for though we were all overpowered with the heat, she was deadly cold except her head, and that was like a fire. Then he asked us a whole heap of questions, and he was mad when he heard of her going to the West End through all the heat; he said she ought not to have left her room; that she must have been very ill for days; that he ought to have been sent for before, and a great deal more. Oh! but he was angry; and I couldn't help telling him it was not *our* place to send for him, while the missis kept about and the master never said a word, and a lot of people invited for a dinner-party. And then Susan told him how awful bad she looked at dinner yesterday, 'specially when you was angry about the fish and the cutlets; and he said she was not fit to sit at the head of a table—she ought to have been lying down in a cool, shaded room, with nothing to worry her, and some light nourishing thing or other instead of regular dinner. And he promised to send a nurse who knew her business, and whom he would trust with his own wife; and he bade us, if we valued our mistress's life, keep the house as still as death; so we went and muffled the bells, and stopped the gardener a-rolling the gravel walks, and—that's all, I think!"

"And enough too," thought Robert. He could perceive that the girl, though she did not venture to upbraid him, regarded him as responsible in a great measure for

her mistress's illness ; nor could he feel himself altogether free from blame, more especially when he remembered his ill-humour of the preceding evening. Jane went back to the sick-chamber, and left her master to his own reflections, which were the reverse of agreeable. A little later came Susan : "Dinner is quite ready, sir ; we thought we had better ring no bells."

"I do not want any dinner ; you may as well take it away at once, and bring me a cup of tea and a sandwich. I will try to eat something."

Susan vanished, and Robert again remained alone, feeling very much as if he had suddenly walked into a new world where care and sorrow held sway supreme, where the shadow of death rested over all.

The August evening, grey and sultry, closed in early ; not a breath of air seemed stirred, and the leaves of the horse-chestnuts at the side of the house drooped languidly in the still, oppressive atmosphere. There was something unnatural, almost awful, in the silence of the place ; no sound from the kitchens, no hurrying to and fro of busy servants, no footfall on the floors above. And as the dusk deepened Robert felt strangely nervous ; the hush and the solitude oppressed him. What would he not have given at that moment to walk into the deserted drawing-room and find Catherine there, in her usual low chair, with a book in her hand, and her pretty satin-lined work-basket, brought last year from Paris, at her side. Restless and uneasy, he wandered thither. All was darkness ; the sun-blinds had never been raised ; there was no Catherine, though he could just see the little table strewn with some light kind of needlework with which she had doubtless occupied herself yesterday till summoned to the dinner-table. Robert drew up the blinds and let in the sombre, fast-fading twilight, and then he could see the lace and cambric, the small scissors, the thimble, and all the paraphernalia which Catherine had left there on the little table that she called her own. She had not entered the room since she had laid her needle down ; would she ever be there again ? Would he ever see her more in her accustomed place, with the sunset light on her soft, brown, rippling hair, and the needle flying swiftly through

her busy fingers? As he asked the question of himself, it seemed as though there were strange echoes in his ears of "Nevermore; no! nevermore!"

"What a fool I am!" he exclaimed to himself, as he started at his own dim reflection in the mirror; "I did not think I was such a nervous subject. See my wife again in yonder chair? Of course, she will be there again in a few days, all right, and better than ever! I have heard it said that when people have been out of health for some time, a spell of downright illness often sets them straight again; and I dare say it will be so in this case. Rayner is always looking at the dark side of things; he is not nearly as hopeful and as cheering as a medical man ought to be. Of course, it is this unprecedented heat that has half-killed poor Catherine; and —and I suppose the dinner-party was a great trouble to her, and I really *was* as cross as two sticks last night. I forget exactly what I said, but I know my temper was up, and I vented it on her. I wish I had not spoken so unkindly! If she should not recover—pshaw! what stuff! Of course she will recover; there is no question about it. She must be very ill, though, to require a professional nurse; and there's something very queer about this stupor she has fallen into. It isn't sleep, and it isn't *syncope*, as Rayner calls it. I don't like it! I don't like it at all! I wish she would not lie in that deathlike state. I wish I could make her understand that I am not angry with her now—poor Catherine! Oh dear! how foolish women are, taking every hasty word to heart, and always fancying themselves neglected! Perhaps she has come to herself by this time. I think I'll go and see."

He went out, and on the stairs, which were now lighted up, he met a respectable, middle-aged woman, who curtsied slightly as he passed. He stopped. "You are the nurse, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir; though not the nurse Dr. Rayner promised. I am Nurse Burns. Nurse Morris was called away to a critical case this afternoon; but I will do my best, I have had a great deal of experience, and I do not mind trouble. I don't mind putting my hand to anything that's wanted, sir."

"Oh! so you are not *the* nurse—Nurse Morris?" said Robert, in a half-injured tone. He had never even heard of Mrs. Morris, and he did not know one nurse from another; but, somehow, he felt vexed and ill-treated at the advent of this woman, whom Dr. Rayner had evidently ranked as only second-best. Nurse Burns, however, had looks that commended her to the profession. She was a well-made, perfectly healthy woman of fifty or thereabouts, with a sensible, not to say intellectual, expression of countenance, dark eyes full of gentleness and sympathy, and a very sweet mouth, indicative of kindness and consolation. Robert felt drawn to her, in spite of himself; hard man of the world as he was, he recognised instinctively a good, true, womanly woman, who might be trusted with life itself. "Have you seen Mrs. Wreford?" he inquired.

"I have, sir; and I am sorry to say it is a very bad case."

"What do you mean by 'a very bad case'?"

"When I say a bad case, sir, I do not mean a hopeless one. I mean a case in which there is a good deal of danger; a case in which all depends on skilful medical attendance and careful nursing; but still, a case that *may* take a wrong turn, and baffle both doctor and nurse, in spite of everything."

"Is my wife sensible now?"

"No, sir; consciousness will not return just yet. Were you going to her room? If I might advise, I should say keep away; you can do no good; she would not know you, and you would be distressed. She is moaning a good deal, and seems getting restless. I have ordered the servants, one and all, to keep away, except Jane, who has been in the habit of waiting on her mistress. The fewer in the room at any time, the better. Dr. Rayner particularly impressed upon me the importance of perfect quiet."

"He is coming again to-night?"

"Yes, sir; I never knew him more anxious. He will not sleep till he has seen Mrs. Wreford."

"Let me know when he comes. I shall not go to bed till he has paid his visit."

"Very well, sir." And Nurse Burns went her way to her scene of duty.

It was past eleven before the Doctor paid his visit, and nearly twelve before he came downstairs, to find himself waylaid by Robert, who invited him into the dining-room to smoke a cigar. Dr. Rayner's first impulse was to refuse; the next moment he thought better of it. He wanted to speak a few wholesome truths to Mr. Wreford, and, though it was late, he was within ten minutes' walk of his own home. He waited till he was established with his cigar and a large tumblerful of seltzer-water, just qualified with a little sherry, before him, ere he spoke, and then he paused for his host to take the initiative.

"Well, Doctor," said Robert, "and how is your patient? What is her malady?"

"I can hardly tell you yet," he replied, laying down the just-lighted cigar. "It is a most singular case, though by no means a solitary one. Mrs. Wreford has been overwrought—*overwrought*."

"I do not quite see how that can be; she has had literally nothing to do but give orders. We have, I believe, thoroughly efficient servants, and plenty of them; there was no need that she should exert herself in the smallest degree."

"Possibly not. I should have said she has been *mentally* overwrought."

"She has had no anxieties—merely petty household cares, such as any married woman at the head of her own establishment is likely to encounter."

"More than that!" said the Doctor, gravely, with a puff.

"I do not understand."

"Mr. Wreford, there are times when medical men, as well as ministers of the Gospel, feel it incumbent on them to speak the naked truth. I speak it now from a sense of duty. Mrs. Wreford's illness has had its origin in the mind more than in the body. She is naturally healthy, but not over strong. She has been unhappy, and she has struggled with her unhappiness and disappointment till she could bear it no longer, and she has succumbed."

"Unhappy! Disappointed! *My wife!* I can only

say she has not had a wish ungratified, only she wishes for so little! Her want of wholesome ambition, her almost apathetic contentment, have been to me a source of considerable regret, I assure you."

"Precisely! and you have urged her beyond her strength. The life she has led for the last two years has been a most uncongenial one. She was formed for simple home joys and domestic affections, and she has been forced into fashionable dissipation. She needed her daughter's companionship and her husband's tender regards. As to the first, she has been separated from her child, who is part of her very life; as to the second!—ask your own heart; it is not for me to bring any accusation."

"Business has so much occupied me," faltered Robert. "But it was all for her—for her and Anne, and she never complained of neglect."

"She is not that sort of woman; but she has certainly drooped for want of affection this long time. All this summer she has been growing weaker. I told you so six weeks ago."

"You did; God forgive me!" said Robert, penitently. His conscience was slowly, but surely, awakening; and he knew, far better than Dr. Rayner could tell him, that he had been for years cold and unkind to Catherine; that he had neglected her, while he was surrounding her with luxuries; that he had been harsh and stern, if not positively cruel, even while he flattered himself that he was making her the happiest of women, the most envied of all her circle. The more he thought of last night, the more he was penetrated with a sense of his unfeeling severity; he had been a brute, and nothing less; the Doctor's reproaches were almost welcome to his remorseful spirit.

"Doctor!" he said, laying down his unlighted cigar, "I wish I had hearkened to you; I wish I had attended more to my poor Catherine's complaints. You are right! I perceive now that my wife, as far as her affections are concerned, has been starved to death! Then she has, as you say, been forced into a position to which she was unequal; her duties have been a burden upon her, and when she remonstrated, however gently, I turned a deaf

ear, or else rebuked her for selfishness, apathy, and want of energy. I acknowledge my fault, and I will amend my ways."

The Doctor leaned forwards, and grasped Robert's hand. "Your candour does you honour," he said; "not one man in a hundred but would have deeply resented the implication. To feel your error is, I am certain, to retrieve it. Pray God, it is not too late."

"Too late! You don't mean that there is so much danger as your tone implies? You think you will frighten me into good behaviour? No need."

"Far from it! I should not think of frightening you. But I dare not hide from you the—the probability—rather, I should say, the *possibility*—there is of my patient's not pulling through this very serious illness."

"Is it fever?"

"It is, and of a very peculiar kind, complicated with other ailments, all of which have been gradually taking root for some months past. I need not say I will do all that in me lies, and I should like to have a consultation with one or more of my brethren—that is, if the symptoms I apprehend be developed. The nurse in attendance is a very superior woman, and eminently trustworthy in all respects."

"When will she know me again?"

"Your wife? That is more than I can tell you. All depends upon the course taken by the disease. I only wish I had been called in two days earlier. However, it is useless deploring what cannot be recalled. Only a fool cries over spilt milk; the wise man resolves to be so careful that no more milk shall be spilt. But the marvel to me is how the poor lady kept up so long! The first stage of the fever set in full forty-eight hours ago; how she went about the house even yesterday, I cannot understand; and how she took that journey to the West End this morning is little short of a miracle! I would give all my fees for the month to cancel that most unlucky procedure; I could have dealt with the case so much more easily had she remained quietly in her bed this morning. But I always knew her for a plucky, never-say-die woman, who would keep up as long as

her limbs would support her ! My wife would have given in long ago."

Long after Dr. Rayner went home Robert sat still in the dining-room, his cigar unlighted, his soda-water untouched. He was retracing his life from the very day of his marriage, and for the first time he saw himself in his true colours. "I have been a wretch, a *wretch*!" he whispered, as he rose and walked out into the garden, over which shone the solemn light of a low, waning moon. He paced the solitary walks, now making confession to himself of a hundred petty unkindnesses which a too faithful memory recalled, now glancing up at the faint ray that came from his wife's bedroom window, now praying that he might be permitted to make amends for many years to come.

"She shall be troubled no more with entertainments," he said, at last; "and Anne, if her mother really wishes it, shall finish her education at home. I will pet her, and make much of her, as I have never done yet, and she shall be happy in her own way—my poor, faithful, slighted Catherine. Surely, surely, this strange sickness is not unto death ! O God ! do not punish me for all my shortcomings by taking away my wife ; and I never knew till to-night how much I loved her—how much I should lose if she went away to Thee ! Be merciful, O God ! "

How long he would have paced the garden-walks, it is impossible to say, had not the church clock boomed out its two deep, solemn strokes. He knew the sound well enough, but just then, to his excited fancy, it seemed like a knell. In spite of the sultriness of the night, he shivered, and turned towards the house just as a broad, blue flame shone on the trees and flowers, and an awful voice peeled warningly from the mass of black, heavy clouds, which had gradually risen upwards since he commenced his lonely promenade. He stepped through the open window, closed it, and as quietly as possible put to the shutters—another flash of blinding light showing every leaf upon the old mulberry tree and every spray on the great cedars on the lawn, startling him as he did so. Then came the loud roar of the thunder ; the storm, which

had brooded over London for days past, was evidently breaking in all its long-repressed violence.

Now, Robert had a constitutional horror of electric disturbances. He used to say only two things could make him really nervous—a mad dog and a tremendous thunder-storm. But all he thought of that night was the effect the noise and the glare of the lightning might have on Catherine. He opened the dining-room door, and saw the gas still burning in the hall and on the landing above, and though there was the silence of death, except for the loud explosions overhead, he knew that there were watchers in his wife's chamber. "It is of no use going to bed till this uproar is over," he said; "I may as well stay where I am, though I don't know what I shall be fit for in the morning, and I have plenty of work before me. Dear me, there is that abominable party, and none of the invited guests put off! If I don't write ten or a dozen notes immediately, I shall have them all trooping here at seven o'clock to-morrow night—to-night, indeed, for this is the 10th; it is morning already."

Then he took pen and paper and wrote the necessary notes, one form of words serving for the lot. It was past three, and the storm was dying away in low, murmuring peals, and flickering gleams of blue and rosy lightning, when he closed and addressed the last envelope. He felt tired then, and he was almost tempted to fling himself on the sofa, and take an impromptu sleep at once, but he prudently resolved to go to bed. As he cleared away the writing materials—for Robert would have been neat and methodical were he waiting for execution at the Old Bailey—he noticed a little book which he had inadvertently taken from the davenport, together with the blotting and note paper. Almost unconsciously he opened it, and the first word upon which his glance fell was "*Nevermore!*" There was nothing extraordinary in that, for it was a volume of Edgar Poe's poems which he had lighted on, and the pages fell apart at his celebrated and weird stanzas of "*The Raven*," the refrain of which is, as everybody knows, "*Nevermore!*" Nevertheless, the strong-minded, unsentimental Robert Wreford closed the book with a shiver. The word had been surging in his

ears for hours, and it struck him with a sudden terror to see it there, in print; it was utter foolishness, he knew, but he could not help interpreting it as an evil omen. With a heavy heart and sad forebodings he turned off the gas, and went up to bed. He stopped at Catherine's door, and the nurse came to him on tiptoe, with her finger on her lips. "She is getting delirious," she said, as she drew him a little further back. "Don't let her see you, it might excite her."

"Then she is no better?" he inquired.

Nurse Burns shook her head. "No; we cannot hope for a favourable change so soon. Pray, sir, go to bed, and get rest and strength. We don't know what is before us." And Robert went on to his own room, and ere he shut himself in he paused on the threshold listening—to what? To the slow ticking of the house clock in the hall below, which seemed to say audibly, "Nevermore! Nevermore!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOPES AND FEARS.

THE delirium lasted for days, without one lucid interval. Catherine was never violent. She did not rave or shriek like some fever patients; but she talked incessantly, and continually bemoaned herself on her own shortcomings as a wife, and bewailed her unfitness for the position into which she was unfortunately thrust. She fancied that Nurse Burns was the old aunt who had brought her up, and to her she poured out her heart. "You know, aunt," she said, "you never taught me to be a grand lady. I never expected to be a rich man's wife; it was too late to begin. I did try, but I could not please Robert. I was always doing something wrong—always forgetting my position,

he said. And I was very stupid, very dall ; not at all the wife for him. He ought to have waited till he could have married a lady born and bred. And now he has left me ; he has put me away from him because we could not have that dinner-party, through some fault of mine. I don't know how it was, but it was all my fault, for he told me so ! And he never will forgive me any more. He is gone, and he will never come back—never again ! You must let me go home with you, aunt, to the old lodgings in Skinner Street, and I will take to the dressmaking again. I have always kept it up, though Robert would not let me make my own dresses any longer."

And then she called for Anne, complaining that they kept the child away from her ; and again, she was packing up for her Continental journey, and had no clothes but such as Robert would disapprove. But worst of all, was the delusion that the dreaded dinner-party was still impending, and nothing was ready ; and the fruiterer had sent her hard, green apples instead of peaches, and vegetable marrows instead of pines and melons. And her constant lament was, " Oh, he will be so displeased—so very much displeased ! Oh, what shall I do ? What shall I do ? " And then she would wring her poor thin hands, and weep bitterly, and say that she had tried to do her best, and now could do no more. " Oh, why was Robert so unkind ? oh, why must they be such fashionable people ? "

For several days, strange to say, no one thought of sending for Anne, though her mother talked incessantly about her, and sometimes addressed her as if she were present. At last Dr. Rayner said, " Ought not Miss Wreford to be sent for ? "

Robert started. " It is not so bad as that, surely ? "

" Not so bad that I dare not bid you still hope for the best ; but I tell you plainly that the chances of recovery are as ten to one. We can fight the fever, but we cannot cope with the extreme prostration which will presently ensue. As soon as the delirium ceases, the real struggle will commence ; it will be life or death ! and it is only due to your daughter that she should be with her mother, in either alternative."

"Is there any danger of infection?"

"Not the smallest. My advice is, that you immediately summon Miss Wreford; it might have a most disastrous effect should reason suddenly return, and the child be inquired for in vain."

"I will write at once; or had I better telegraph?"

"I think you might trust to the post; telegrams are so alarming. Write an urgent letter to Madame de la Tour, and entreat her to send home her pupil without delay. I suppose Anne can travel alone?"

"She can; though, of course, I had rather she did not. Fortunately Anne has plenty of courage and self-reliance; my only fear is lest Madame should detain her till a proper escort can be found. Frenchwomen have such exaggerated notions of propriety."

"Write peremptorily; let there be no mistake as to your meaning. If I know anything of Miss Anne, Madame will be powerless to restrain her when she knows the truth."

"The question is whether Madame will tell her the truth. I think I must write to her as well as to her governess."

But the difficulty was quickly surmounted. Within half-an-hour affairs had unexpectedly arranged themselves. Philip Rutland came in to inquire how Mrs. Wreford was; he had only just heard of her illness, through one of the guests who was to have been at that luckless dinner-party. He had been down to Bournemouth with his aunt and elder sisters, and had only returned to town two days ago. Hearing how matters stood, he at once volunteered to go in person, by that night's express, and fetch Anne with all possible despatch. It need not be said that Robert most thankfully accepted the young man's offer, and Philip hurried back to his place of business to give a few necessary orders, and then rushed off to Dover by the night's tidal train, and found himself in France ere the sun had pierced the early morning mists. Stopping only to swallow a hasty breakfast, he went on to Paris, and was in Madame's presence early in the afternoon. He was fortunate enough to sleep all through the journey, only rousing up at Amiens, to make

a raid upon the *buffet*, and then dozing off again, till the train was actually in sight of the Arc de Triomphe.

Madame was very much shocked, and did not even demur, as Philip had feared she would, at entrusting her pupil to a young man who came with no better credentials than a verbal message. Happily, Madame de la Tour was used to Philip by this time; she had always transacted business with him on his sister's account, and he was so grave and staid, and had, as she averred, so much dignity, that she quite forgot or ignored the terrible fact that Mr. Rutland was young and unmarried, and that he was in no wise related to Mademoiselle Vréford, although Mademoiselle Nellie Rootlande might be his veritable sister! She at once went in search of poor Anne, and sent Nellie into the *salon* to talk to her brother, while some refreshment was preparing. By five o'clock Philip was once more in the train, and Anne by his side, Paris lying far behind them in the golden mists of the hot, hazy August afternoon.

For a few minutes Anne had seemed stunned. She had turned so pale that Madame feared she was about to faint; but, quickly rallying, she had declared herself ready to set off immediately. She only waited, indeed, to change her dress, while Nellie hurriedly packed a small portmanteau, and promised to take care of all properties left behind; for they had but three-quarters of an hour in which to make all needful preparations and reach the *Embarcadère du Nord*, and Paris cabs are not remarkable for speed.

She asked very few questions till she and Philip were alone in the railway-carriage, and then, drawing a deep breath, and looking pitifully at her friend, she implored to be told "all about it."

But Philip had little to tell, for he had not lingered at Ivyside a moment longer than was necessary, after his hasty journey was determined on. He could only say that Mrs. Wreford was very ill—dangerously so, he feared; for all that he had heard caused him to apprehend the worst, and he thought it no kindness to buoy the poor child up with hopes which could scarcely be realised.

"You don't think she was *dying* when you came away?"

she asked, almost under her breath; she could not utter such a question aloud, though only Philip heard her.

"No," he returned, gently; "there was yet hope. But Anne, my dear, she was very, *very ill!*"

"And how long has she been ill?"

"I do not know, for I have been away at Bournemouth; but it is some days since they summoned Dr. Rayner, I believe."

"Some days! And I never knew! Oh, why was I not sent for before? But it was like papa! he always thinks of his own pleasure and convenience, and he never cares that he hurts me and my mother. If mother should die, I don't know if I could forgive father."

"Hush, dear Anne! you are going home to comfort your father as well as to nurse your mother, for he is in the deepest sorrow. He is fearfully altered since I saw him last; he looks older by ten years. Now try to compose yourself, that you may be of the more use at your journey's end."

At Amiens Philip made Anne swallow a cup of coffee, and a bun; he hoped she would go to sleep as it grew quite dark, but she sat sad and silent, with wide open eyes, only now and then looking at her watch to see how the time went on. It was almost midnight when at last they reached Calais, and got on board the steamer. At Dover there was a little delay, and again Philip urged Anne to take some food, which, she declared, she could not touch. But he persisted: "If you mean to be of any use at home, you must keep up your strength; it is mere selfishness to give way to your own feelings, and you are bound to take care of yourself if you are presently to care for others. A good nurse always studies her own health."

Anne at once obeyed; she ate some of the chicken set before her, but it was not much, and Philip was wise enough not to press her beyond her powers. He admired her quiet submission to his will, and he praised her for the effort she had made. Through the early morning mists and dews the train sped on its way, and the sun was shining brightly when once more they saw the great dome of St. Paul's, all aglow with ruddy gleams. The traffic in the streets was, as yet, scarcely at half-tide, so they

drove on quickly as soon as a cab could be secured, and in little more than half-an-hour they were at Ivyside. To her dying day Anne would never forget that journey; Philip would never be to her like any common friend.

As the cab drew up to the gate she looked out, and saw, to her infinite relief, that, early as it was, there were signs of life about the house. She had so dreaded the sight of darkened windows that she had trembled all over as they drove along from Cambridge Heath. At least her mother was alive, and that, for the moment, seemed comfort enough. Her father met her at the door, and folded her in his arms with a warmth of feeling for which she was not prepared. She had never in all her life seen him so moved; she had never felt so near to him, never so fully recognised his paternal claims. He looked worn and pallid, and, as Philip had observed, ten years older!

No word was exchanged between them till they were in the dining-room, and then Robert kissed his girl again, and said, "Anne, I cannot tell you how thankful I am that you are come; I did not venture to expect you so soon."

"We came as fast as steam could bring us; but, father, how is mother?"

"No better, no better, I am afraid. The only comfort I have is that the doctors say she is no worse."

"Will she know me?"

"I fear not. And yet they think the fever has loosened its hold; it is the excessive weakness that we dread; there are doubts whether she can have strength enough to rally—whether, when the delirium passes, she will not sink and sink in spite of all that can be done."

"Oh, let but the fever go, and I think she *must* recover. We shall watch every breath, you know; and she must have nourishment and stimulant, and whatever the doctors order, continually. If care can keep her alive—!"

And then Anne stopped with a sudden choke, for her father's face showed how little he shared the hopes she so fondly entertained. "When can I see her?" she asked, presently.

"We must speak to Nurse Burns; she was very anxious

for you to arrive. She has been a real blessing to us, Anne. She will let you in as soon as ever it is right. But she told me an hour ago that you must rest, and take some breakfast, before you saw poor mamma; and I think she was right."

"Very well," said Anne, resignedly. "I will go to my room now. I do not want any breakfast, though—I had coffee and chicken at Dover; but pray let some one attend properly to Philip."

It was late in the day when Anne did see her mother, for, in spite of her intense solicitude, the weary girl no sooner lay down on her bed, intending to rest for an hour or two at the utmost, than she fell into a profound slumber, which nurse advised should not be disturbed, since the invalid knew nothing of her daughter's presence in the house, and it was most expedient that the young lady should gather strength and nerve for the trial that awaited her. For too well Nurse Burns knew that the girl would see death in her mother's altered countenance.

At last Anne could be admitted to the sick chamber. She had slept and eaten and taken a bath, according to the nurse's requirements, and now she was free to establish herself at her mother's bedside. Tremblingly, but with an outward calmness that gave token of her powers of self-control, she entered the room, and gazed at the small, ghostly face upon the pillow with hot, tearless eyes and suspended breath. Was that white, sunken face her mother's? Were those skeleton fingers, that almost transparent hand, the same that she had fondled in her own warm, healthy clasp not many months before? "She is going to die," was Anne's unuttered moan. "She would not look like that if she could live." But then she remembered to have heard of almost miraculous restorations as from the very gates of death; and might not her mother's case be one of these? She took hope again. She *would* hope so long as life remained.

The marble-like features were motionless, the eyes were closed. Anne wondered if she slept. "Speak to her, dear," said nurse, presently; "perhaps she will know your voice. She was quite sensible a little while ago, when I roused her to take what was ordered."

Anne bent down, and kissed the chilly, purple lips. "Mother darling," she said, softly, "here is your little Anne; she wants a look from you."

The heavy eyelids unclosed, and a look of wonder stole over the poor faded face. "*Is it my Anne?*" feebly whispered the almost extinguished voice; "my own little Anne, once more?"

"Yes, mother sweet, your very own Anne; come home to nurse you till you are quite well again."

"I thought—I thought," murmured the invalid, "that—that you might not come to me! I thought your father had sent me away—quite away, for always."

"What nonsense, darling! Father send you away, indeed! Why, he has been breaking his heart about you! I did not think poor father could be so miserable as he has been—and *is*—on account of your illness. Where did you think he sent you?"

"I don't know. I thought I went back to old Aunt Simmons. But, Anne, is the dinner-party over? Did it go off all right?"

"All right! splendidly!" boldly answered Anne, not knowing in the least to what Catherine referred, but perceiving that there was some deep-seated anxiety that had better be removed immediately. "Everything is right, mother precious," she continued, "now that you are better. You have been very ill, you know—what Jane calls 'off your head,' and that was why you fancied you were sent away, and were with Aunt Simmonds. People have such funny fancies when they are a little delirious."

"Have I been delirious? Ah, then, I did fancy it all, I suppose. Where is father?"

"Downstairs; I almost think he is in the garden. Jane says he has walked about there under the trees all day, and nearly all night, ever since you became ill."

"Has he not been to Fenchurch Street?"

"Scarcely at all! Never for more than an hour or two at a time, when he could not help going. Do you think he could attend to business while you were so ill that you knew nobody?"

"Will he come and see me?"

"He will be only too glad to know you asked for him;

but I see nurse thinks we have talked quite long enough for once. You are to take some of this stuff—essence of beef, is it? and then you are to go to sleep; and then, when you awake, father will come to you. I shall sit by your side, darling, and the moment you open your eyes you will see me. I know you will like *that*! I know mother wanted her own little girl!"

"Wanted you, dear? You don't know how much! But, Anne, I also want to be quite sure father is not angry with me. He might not tell you, but I should know in a minute if I saw him."

"He is just about as angry as I am, and if you don't shut your eyes, I shall scold awfully. I am the mistress now, you see! What fun it is to have to make one's own mother obey one!"

And very soon Catherine did sleep, her weak fingers lying in her child's soft, warm clasp. And all the rest of that day, and far into the evening, she slept, only half awaking when nurse fed her with a spoon from time to time, and dropping off again as soon as left alone. Anne watched and watched, her fond hopes rising every hour; and Robert came, and shared that patient vigil, and he, too, began to feel that this blessed slumber might be as healing balm. Surely, surely, now she would recover! Dr. Rayner paid his visit, and seemed satisfied; she could not do better than sleep, he said, provided nourishment was regularly administered. But when Robert stole after him, hoping to find that the Doctor shared his favourable opinion, he was disappointed, and almost angry, to receive no better assurance than, "Better in one sense, certainly; the fever crisis is past, but the worst, I fear, remains. There is such an utter want of stamina."

And Anne, as she watched, prayed silently, saying often to herself, she knew not why—"Lord! if she sleep, she shall do well!" And, surely, the invalid's breathing was stronger, and more regular; the face, her attendants thought, was a little less death-like, and nourishment was taken with less difficulty.

When Catherine at last woke, both Robert and Anne were beside her; and Robert, trembling lest she should be injuriously exerted, bent down and kissed her tenderly—

as he had not kissed his wife for many a day, as he, alas! well knew. The faint, sweet smile that flitted over the delicate features told him how welcome was the fond and long-withheld embrace. And then Anne must kiss her mother, too, and afterwards her father, and Catherine lay still, with a look of deep content, such as she had not worn for many weary months.

"Oh! why did you not send for me before, father?" asked Anne, as they sat at supper together, a little later, in the dining-room.

And Robert replied, "I could not, Anne; as long as you were not sent for, I could flatter myself there was no immediate danger. And your presence would have been useless several days ago. The fever would have had its course in any case; Dr. Rayner said so. Now you seem to have come at the right moment. I am so thankful you were the first person she saw when consciousness returned."

"She will get better all one way now?"

"I hope so, my child; if care and skill can save her, she will certainly recover; and I really think you have proved to be the best physician."

"Then I must stay at home, and nurse dear mother till she is quite, *quite* well, and as strong as she used to be several years ago."

"That you shall, my dear! Madame must not expect to see you back again yet awhile; indeed, if your mother wishes it, you shall continue at home, and have masters, and just go abroad, all three of us together, once a year."

"Oh, charming! That would be delightful; and, father, I would work with masters. I have learned to appreciate educational advantages, you know; I am no longer a child."

"That you have proved, my dear. You have grown into a very good, sensible, useful girl—I was just going to say *young woman*! But that is rather premature, I think, though you look and speak as if you were a good deal older than you are."

"I feel almost grown-up sometimes. Madame used to lecture me for not being young enough in my manner; was it not queer? Perhaps nature will revenge herself

by making me play girlish pranks when I ought to be old. Now, father, I shall send you to bed ; you own to not having had a night's rest for you don't know how long ! As I have slept half the day, I am wide awake, and I am going to sit up with mother ; nurse says I may ; it is quite best that I should. What a very nice woman Nurse Burns is—so kind and thoughtful and clever, and religious, too, without being disagreeable ! ”

“ That is rather an odd qualification, Anne ! ”

“ I suppose it is, father ; but really so many people that are *supposed* to be religious do go into such tempers, and are so cross and complaining and gloomy—looking always on the dark side, and thinking mainly about themselves and their own interests—that, as a rule, I had rather not have to do with religious people ; not with the exact sort, I mean, at any rate. I have come to the conclusion, father, that the religion that does not come out in good temper and kindness and cheerfulness and doing good to others, is no religion at all, and had better be let alone, because it makes professors deceive themselves, and aggravates other folks, and does them harm by setting them against the real thing.”

Robert assented, but he made no reply. What Anne said was painfully true, for he knew that of late years he had by no means adorned the Gospel he professed. He was quite ready to go off to bed and enjoy the first night's real repose he had known since the commencement of Catherine's illness, while Anne prepared to watch at her mother's bedside, that Nurse Burns might get a little sleep, and yet remain within call.

And from that day Catherine mended up to a certain point—and no farther ! She soon began to speak audibly, to take an interest in what was going on, to enjoy a little quiet reading, to look forward to Robert's coming home—for he was compelled now to attend more regularly to business—and to revel in the constant companionship of her child. She even left her bed, and enjoyed the change to the sofa. But when the time came that she ought to have made the next move by going downstairs, or, at least, into another room, she suddenly and mysteriously lost ground. There was no actual relapse, but she did

not gain strength; on the contrary, she found the daily migration from bed to couch less easy and more exhausting as time passed on.

"No," said Dr. Rayner to his wife, "poor Mrs. Wreford will never come downstairs again; I have known it all along, and the physicians agreed with me from the first consultation. I say nothing to Mr. Wreford nor to poor Anne; they may as well be happy while they can. They will be undeceived quite soon enough. Indeed, I fancy Mr. Wreford is beginning already to apprehend the truth—the sad, inevitable end."

CHAPTER XXIV.

ANNE'S SUNDAY MORNING.

"MOTHER, you don't get on!" said Anne, one fine autumn morning. "And it is not only that you don't improve, but you certainly go back; and I am not at all satisfied about you. You ought to be downstairs by this time, you know."

"Ought I? Well, I suppose I really must make the effort; but you cannot think how comfortable I find myself up here, with nothing to do or to think about, and you and father spoiling me in all sorts of ways. I am afraid I am lazy, making my holiday last as long as ever I can."

"Lazy, indeed! You were always too hard upon yourself, mother, and not hard enough on other people. Of course you are lazy, if weakness is laziness. That is what I complain of; you are no stronger than you were a fortnight ago, and, in fact, I am not sure that you are as strong. Why! now I come to think of it, you get up later than you did then, and you seldom stir from that sofa. A fortnight ago you took a little walk on the land-

ing, and you helped me dress that doll for little Polly Rayner. Mother, it won't do."

"Well, Anne, I will make an attempt on Monday. This is Saturday, is it not? Let me have one more quiet, restful Sunday. I did so enjoy last Sunday, though I am afraid I was very selfish in letting both you and your father remain with me in the evening. Yes, dear, I really will try to get down to dinner on Monday. We might have it earlier than usual, and perhaps your father could manage to get home soon enough to help me downstairs. Easy as our stairs are, I don't think I dare venture without his arm; I totter so, even when I lean on you."

"Oh, mother dear, I did not mean that. I shall not let you make any 'attempt' on Monday; you are not fit for it. What vexes me is that you are not fit, and I was going to say that I should like you to see Dr. Lawley again. Our own good Dr. Rayner is very clever, I know; but perhaps he does not quite understand your case, and there might be—I am sure there *must* be—some peculiar medicine or something that would set you up in no time. I do wish you would try that *Revalenta* again. Mrs. Markham says she is quite sure it saved her life after that gastric fever she had five years ago."

"It does not agree with me; I *cannot* take it. And as for Dr. Lawley, it is not likely that he could do better for me than Dr. Rayner, who knows all about my constitution. And I am really ashamed of being so expensive, and giving so much trouble."

"Trouble! expense! As if you were not worth it all, and ten times more. Besides, we have plenty of money now, and a few pounds more or less need not be any difficulty. I do believe father would give a thousand pounds this minute to see you in your own place downstairs again! And I am sure I do not know to whom you give the trouble. I enjoy nursing you more than I can tell, and it really is great fun to put down my lady cook, when she bows and scrapes, and twists her oily tongue, and tries to wriggle out of every sort of blame."

"You don't mean to say you scold *her*?"

"Don't I just! I am growing a regular vixen, though

I get on very well with the other servants. But I do abominate that cook! At first she tossed her head, and set me at defiance; but I soon gave her to understand that she could not do that. The other day she said she would order some veal sweetbreads, which I knew we did not want, because you were tired of them, and papa said he would prefer stewed kidneys; so I told her *not* to order them. She looked at me as much as to say I knew nothing at all about it, and when, a little while afterwards, the butcher's boy came, I *heard* her tell him to bring them. She meant me to hear, for she shouted, and must have seen me at the open window. Well, I took no notice then; but I at once settled my plan of action, and she fancied she had got her way. In about half an hour, I saw the butcher coming in again at the side-gate with the basket on his arm, which of course contained the sweetbreads—four of them, I heard her say. At that moment you wanted me, so I could not do exactly as I had intended, which was to make the butcher take back his sweetbreads there and then; but as soon as I had the time I went downstairs and into the kitchen, and there, sure enough, were the sweetbreads on a dish upon the dresser—and very nice they looked, I must say. 'Cook,' I began, very solemnly, 'I desired you *not* to order those sweetbreads.' And her answer was pretty much what I expected: 'I know what is required, miss, and you don't; I always have sweetbreads in the house when I can get them, and your pa likes them.' 'That is neither here nor there,' I said. 'I told you *not* to order the sweetbreads, and, when I speak, I expect to be obeyed. *They must go back!*' Oh, mother! I wish you had seen her; it was as good as a play! She looked as if she felt the shock of an earthquake. 'But I can't send them back *now*, miss,' she said, in her half-patronising, half-impudent way. 'I couldn't do such a thing, after the man has had the trouble of bringing them.' 'Then *I* shall send them back,' I answered; 'for cooked or otherwise disposed of in this house they shall not be!' And then I told Susan to get a little basket, and carry them back immediately, that the butcher might not lose the sale of them. I knew Susan would do as she

was bid, and I saw her leave the kitchen, taking the sweetbreads with her. And then, of course, Mrs. Cook and I had a regular passage-at-arms ; but I was too much for her, I think."

" My dear, how could you ? I wonder she did not give notice ! "

" She *threatened* to give notice, but did not. I wish she would ; but I am afraid there is little hope of that. She would be a very foolish woman if she put herself out of such a situation, where her wages are the least part of her gains. Oh no, mother ! her bread is so well buttered that she will put up with a sprinkling of pepper on it now and then. But, of course, she told me *I* was not her mistress."

" What did you reply to that ? "

" I boldly replied that I was, and that she would have no other mistress for a good while to come, for that my father had desired me to undertake the housekeeping for a few months, till you were quite strong again. And then, mother, I drew myself up, and looked as much like a grown woman as I could. I felt very glad to think I was so tall, and that you let me wear long skirts ; and I said, ' And next time, cook, you disobey me openly, I shall give you a month's notice on the spot.' And what do you think she did ? I was fairly dumbfounded. She began to *cry* ! and to talk about her poor, sick, destitute sister, and her crippled old father, and her paralytic some one else ! And ever since, when I say I wish so-and-so, or desire any change, she makes a sort of Court courtesy, with her head all on one side, and a most gracious expression of countenance, and replies quite blandly, ' I will do *anything* you wish, Miss Wreford ! ' But, of course, she will not, and she knows her fair words go for nothing. It is a regular case of ' diamond cut diamond. ' "

" My dear, how *can* you ? "

" You are not vexed with me, mother ? "

" No, my dear ; though I think it is quite too soon for you to assume the reins of government. However, that is my fault ; they have slipped from my hands, and some one must hold them, and who so fit and proper as yourself ? "

"I am trying to do my best, mother, and I have no trouble with any one but cook. And I rather enjoy the sharpening of the wits she occasions; but, mother, you don't like her—why do you keep her? Let us get rid of her before you are at the helm again."

"My dear, I do not like her; she worries me dreadfully; but then she cooks splendidly; she never fails, unless she fails on purpose to punish me. And nothing upsets your father like a spoiled or inadequate dinner."

"I am sure father will no more wish to keep a servant who displeases you than you would like to keep one who was obnoxious to him."

"Of course, I would not keep one whom he disliked. I would even dismiss Jane, much as I value her, if I found he had an aversion to her. But she *does* cook, you know, and that is the great point, and I dare say we might go farther and fare worse. Professed cooks who are worthy of the name nearly always have queer notions of honesty, I am afraid. And I suppose grand ladies, accustomed to a lavish expenditure, do not mind; but I cannot tell you, Anne, what a real trouble that woman has been to me ever since she came into the house. I never did believe in her, though I tried. My distrust, in spite of every effort, increased rather than diminished; I never could convict her of any actual dishonesty, though I felt certain things were going wrong. I am quite sure we never consumed all that was paid for."

"A great deal is wasted, perhaps. That sort of woman is never, or very seldom, economical."

"I begin to think all cooks are faulty in that respect; bad cooks are wasteful, because so much good food is spoiled, and there is no extravagance worse than that produced by incompetency. Somebody says there is nothing so costly as *muddle*; the maximum of expense with the minimum of comfort. It is perfectly true."

"I can quite believe it. But, mother dear, has cook really troubled you so much?"

"More than I can tell you, Anne. In the first place, she would brook no interference, and yet I was responsible in every particular. And, what was still worse, I felt continually that our substance, in one way or another, was

being wasted, and it seemed to me that I was not doing my duty either by her or by my husband in permitting her conduct to go unchecked. I have often thought enough was squandered in our kitchen to support a poor family, and that distressed me very much. The fact is, my dear, I never was intended to become the mistress of such a household! I was a great deal happier in those days when I had to contrive in order to make both ends meet. I was happiest when I had only one little maid always under my own eye."

"There I cannot go with you, mother. I think it is charming to have plenty of money, and not to be afraid of spending it. I like plenty of servants, too; only, of course, I like them to be satisfactory. Don't worry any more, mother, about servants, or about anything."

"I do not, my child; I am quite at rest now; I trouble myself about nothing. I feel as if I should never be really vexed or crossed again. Except that I am afraid of giving way to self-indulgence, I am content to lie here, and leave the administration in your hands. Only, Anne, my dear, you are too young for the post, and I dread lest it should do you harm."

"I know what you mean, mother mine. You fear lest I should grow arrogant and bumptious and bouncible, and all that, you know! And perhaps I might if you did not warn me, for, I confess, I dearly love to rule. I enjoy having responsibilities, and difficulties only add a sort of zest to them. It pleases me to conquer when I think I am in the right, as I certainly was, in winning the battle of the sweetbreads—as I call that ridiculous encounter. Of course I knew that the sweetbreads could have been used somehow—they would certainly have appeared in some fashion, as I knew all about them; but that was not the point. I gave an order, and it was set at defiance, and I said to myself that would not do if I was to be deputy-mistress in this house; so I determined that away should the things go, even if I paid for them with my own pocket-money. It was the principle for which I contended, you understand, and nothing else. Was I not right, mother?"

"I suppose you were, since you must rule downstairs.

But I should scarcely have had the courage to do it myself. However, my darling, I think I can trust you to be firm, and to maintain discipline, without any undue self-assumption ; I want you to be strong-minded without being selfish and self-willed. I never was as strong-minded as I ought to have been."

" You were always strong enough to do right, which I should fancy is the very best kind of strength of mind. Some people are called strong-minded when they are only obstinate and loud-spoken and full of themselves and their opinions. But I will think of what you say, and try to keep myself humble, and not take *too* much upon myself. I shall not go very far wrong, as long as I have you to guide and counsel me, mother sweet."

" And Anne—have you ever thought that time may not be for long ? "

" Mother ! mother ! you don't mean—you can't mean that — ! " And poor Anne, who had been for a whole week past stifling her fears, and trembling at her own forebodings, fairly broke down. Catherine lay still, looking at her child with eyes of love, and gathering strength to speak. " Hush, dear ; don't cry," she said at last ; " you know these partings must come ; for months past I have felt my strength failing. And I have been so weary, so worn, so longing for rest, dear Anne. Sometimes I have sat saying to myself, ' Where the weary are at rest ! ' till the thought of that coming rest gave me strength and peace again. But I may stay with you a good while yet, dear, though I am more and more certain that I shall never be quite well—never go about my household ways any more."

" Mother, if you don't suffer, I shall not mind if I may but keep you. Oh, mother, I must keep you ! My life would be no life to me, if you were gone out of it. Darling, you don't really think you—are in any danger ? "

" No immediate danger, probably ; but this illness, which has been stealing upon me for months, has done its work. I may rally again and again—at least I think so. And, Anne, I am in God's hands ; it will be as *He* orders, and what *He* chooses is always best. *His will be done.*"

" You don't mean, mother, that you are willing to leave us ? "

" Not quite, perhaps, but I shall be when the time comes. I am not sure that God wants us to say ' Thy will be done ' beforehand. Sufficient unto the day is the grace, as well as the evil, thereof. Our love for God does not annihilate our human affections. When I was a girl, Anne, I knew a dear, good Christian woman, who was always tormenting herself, because, in contemplating distant and possible trials—such as the loss of her husband and children, who were at the time in perfect health—she could not cheerfully, in idea, resign them. And one day she was deplored what she called her ' earthliness ' to her pastor, a man who had suffered many deprivations and much bitter sorrow ; and he told her that she was too impatient, and that she needed more faith, for she might be certain that God would impose no burden upon her without, at the same time, granting her strength to bear it ; and that she must be content with to-day's spiritual manna, and not crave to-morrow's supplies, or, as she was actually doing, supplies which might be never needed. We must live our Christian life from day to day, from hour to hour ; we cannot live it in advance. It is idle to concern ourselves about what may be, and yet more so to be anxious about feelings which may never be called into action. Let us leave the may-be's, as well as the might-have-been's, in God's hands, only cherishing the absolute certainty of His love and goodness, and of His being always a very *present* help in time of trouble."

" For all you say, mother, I believe you are willing now ! I am afraid you *want* to die."

" No, dear, I do not. I must not be impatient to throw off the life that God has given me. One gets over-weary sometimes ; but the greater the weariness the sweeter the rest, when it comes in His good time."

" If you died, mother, I know I should want to die, too ; I should not care to live without you."

" Ah ! so you think now, my child ; but your life is all before you, and time heals even deepest wounds and truest sorrow, especially that which befalls us in youth. Besides, we must not be slothful servants, wanting to go

to sleep before the noon that we may avoid the burdens and the crosses of the later hours. And you know, dear—

“ ‘The day will never endure so long,
But at length it ringeth even-song.’

And the great thing is so to work and so to endure that one may fold one's hands at last, and know that the hour of rest is come, and that the rest is earned, because the long working-day has not been spent in mere self-seeking or in slothful ease. Ah! how sad it must be to have only a wasted life to deliver up into the great Father's hands.”

“ I think, mother, I shall not waste my life. I like to be up and doing.”

“ Yes, dear; but a great deal may be done that is altogether unprofitable in God's sight. A very busy life, an over-busy life, may be wasted just as much as a self-indulgent, ease-loving life.”

“ As how, mother? ”

“ Because the life is self-centred, with no aim but the aggrandisement and satisfaction of self. Learn to live for others, my little Anne. I think you will. Seek the ministry of love, and pray to be delivered always from the fatal sin of selfishness. If there is one sin more deadly than any other, it is selfishness; for it hardens the heart, it stifles conscience, and it is the root of every form of evil; for sin is the natural and inevitable fruit of selfishness. Other crops may fail in spite of all our care and labour; the seeds of selfishness need only to be left alone to live and thrive, and bring forth a hundredfold. Now, dear, I have talked myself tired; let me have my wine and egg, and I will go to sleep, if I can.”

Yes, Catherine had talked far too long, and she knew it; but she felt that opportunities were becoming fewer and fewer; if God called her home very soon—and she was beginning to think it *might* be very soon, now—she had so much she wanted to say before she went,—much to Anne, and some few things to Robert—to the husband and lover of her youth, whose place in her heart had always remained the same, in spite of the cold shadows which had gathered round his image there of late years. For Catherine was one of those women who are

gifted with the power of loving intensely—a fatal power, sometimes, as far as this life is concerned. Her love was at once tender, passionate, and faithful. Of her it might often have been said—

“ Tho' each young flower had died,
There was the root—strong, living, not the less
That all it yielded now was bitterness ;
Yet still such love as quits not misery's side,
Nor drops from guilt its ivy-like embrace,
Nor turns away from death it's pale, heroic face.”

All that day Anne felt an oppression on her spirits, such as she had not experienced since her mother's first illness had abated ; but she kept up a cheerful aspect in the invalid's chamber, and she did not even speak to her father of the fears which increasingly possessed her. She thought he rather avoided private conversation with her.

Next morning she went to chapel, leaving her father and mother alone altogether. Either Anne or Robert always remained at home. Catherine was never left to servants, and Nurse Burns had been called away to another case. Anne never forgot that autumnal Sunday morning, bright and warm as summer, but yet touched with the pensive fingers of decay. The Virginian creepers were glowing like sunset clouds, and waving their rich, crimson trails like royal pennons in the mellow sunshine ; geraniums, asters, and gay nasturtiums still bloomed in many a garden ; the trees in St. Thomas's Square had lost little of their sober foliage, only the vivid green of the plane was tinged here and there with palest amber, and the drooping horse-chestnut fans were tawny-red and orange and dead brown. When she was dressed, as it was yet early, she strolled out into her own ivy-walled garden, listening to the church-bells that were sounding from far and near on the still, soft air ; and, pacing up and down the long walk, under the great elms that bounded on one side the Wreford territories, she might have said :—

“ Heavily hangs the broad sunflower,
Over the grave i' the earth so chilly ;
Heavily hangs the hollyhock,
Heavily hangs the tiger lily.”

Or she might have apostrophised the “ sweet messenger

of calm decay," warbling near her on a loose spray of a late *Gloire de Dijon* rose, thanking him for his "cheerful, tender strain," sweeter than blackbird's song or skylark's thrilling lay. But she was too young to care either for Tennyson or Keble. The "May Queen" of the former and the world-wide known "Sun of my soul" of the latter were all she really knew of either. But her thoughts that morning gradually shaped themselves into verse—well stored in memory, though long uncalled for. Her former governess, Miss Rose, had been fond of making her pupils learn by heart and recite perfectly standard pieces of poetry; and several years before, Anne—with little appreciation of its beauties, and still less comprehension of its meaning—had given her as a class-lesson Longfellow's "*Resignation*." After she had satisfied Miss Rose by reciting it correctly, she thought no more about it. If she had been asked about the poem, she would have replied, unhesitatingly, that she had quite forgotten it, save, perhaps, here and there a line. Now, on that peaceful Sunday morning, some subtle association, some hidden and undefined link of thought's mysterious chain, brought back to her mind, as fresh as if she had learned it only yesterday, the opening stanzas:—

" There is no flock, however watched and tended,
But one dead lamb is there!
There is no fireside, howsoe'er defended,
But has one vacant chair !

" The air is full of farewells to the dying,
And mournings for the dead;
The heart of Rachel, for her children crying,
Will not be comforted."

With one great spasm of agony, the truth seemed flashed into the girl's soul. A little while ago, and the pathetic verses had been only *words*—words with a sad, sweet, rhythmical sound, perhaps—but still *only* words. Now, they were facts, stern and bitter; they embodied a dread and awful reality; they told her that Death was everywhere, that the Great Reaper was never weary, that no threshold could be guarded against his visitation, no happy home exempted from his summons; for Death was the world's despot. Not yet had she learned the grander,

higher truth, that Death is but God's kind angel in disguise; not yet did she comprehend how Death could be swallowed up in victory; that Christ was the King of Death; that He had yielded once to him, to triumph over the grave for evermore; that the sting of the Destroyer—rather, we should say, of the seeming Destroyer—was crushed for ever when the Lord Jesus bowed His thorn-crowned head on Calvary, and crying, "It is finished!" yielded His pure soul to God, the eternal Father.

All this had to come to Anne later, and by degrees; few of us have souls that spring almost to full stature in the hour of birth, and hers was not one of these. Slowly and painfully must the deepest and highest truths be grasped. As the wilderness with its fasting and temptation came before the Transfiguration glory and ecstasy of Tabor; as the anguish of Gethsemane and the pangs of Calvary were before the Ascension joys of Olivet; so must the human soul, following in the blood-tracked steps of its Redeemer, pass through the valley of the shadow of death before it can reach the sunlit slopes of the celestial mountains. Thank God that death is but a shadow—a veiled and awful shadow, truly; that what we call death is but another form of life—the twilight of a summer evening, deepening awhile, and then melting into the delicious radiance of a new and lovely day. Doubtless, "when it comes, death will prove as natural as birth." And, when we think of it, birth is as mystic as death; we know no more of the beginning of this earthly life than we know of its ending. By certain natural laws flesh and blood are born into the world; the wisest of us know no more. But that flesh is only a casket for the precious gem that comes straight from God's own treasury—the destructible garment of the indestructible soul. We only know that "in Him we live." We rejoice that the earthly garment is ours, not ourselves; and that though we lay it aside, when it has served our turn, on the grave's dark, "narrow shelves," the soul that wore it still lives on for ever.

But, as I said, all this we must learn, each one for himself, and life's best lessons are ever costly. We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God;

that kingdom which some people interpret to be heaven, as, in part, it doubtless is, though to my mind it bears a much wider signification; for I think God's kingdom is here, and now, behind us and before us, on earth and in the unknown worlds to come. And what could poor Anne Wreford—not yet a woman, only a woman-child—know of the sad yet joyous experience of those whom God will baptize in the deep waters of affliction ere He sends them forth, tried champions of the Cross, to do His will, and to work His work, as He shall appoint?

But still that Sunday morning was an era in the young girl's life, and she went back into the house another creature, having for a moment seen and felt the presence of the Shadow. It was time now to go to church, and thither she went, and took her accustomed place, with neither father nor mother at her side. She looked through her tears at the vacant seat that she only knew would never be filled again by that beloved one. The tears gathered so thick and fast while the hymn was being sung, that she was glad to bow her head in prayer. I do not think she knew much about the prayer, poor child, though her supplication went up almost unconsciously in an inarticulate wail. As for the sermon, I am not sure that she heard a word of it; but God preaches sometimes, and he who hears the still small voice cannot listen to a mortal's words. When it came to an end—the long sermon, which seemed neither long nor short to Anne, because she had lost all count of time—she had almost forgotten where she was; but—she never knew from whence—perhaps the minister had quoted the text in his discourse—there had come to her something that breathed of hope and strength and consolation: “Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” And in the benediction which followed the last hymn Anne's head was bowed as it was never bowed before, and for a moment the child's soul got a glimpse of the peace that passeth understanding.

Her first idea had been to slip away as quickly as possible when service was over, that she might avoid the usual inquiries after her mother; but, lost in thought, she remained on her knees till the congregation was

dispersing. Then she lingered, putting away the books, hoping that her friends would have preceded her ere she left her pew. And, indeed, most of them were well in advance of her when she found herself in the street again, and she had begun to hope that she had escaped what she sorely dreaded, when suddenly a voice from behind said, "That's Anne Wreford. I wonder how her mother is!"

Her first impulse was to hurry on, but the voice was so close, a moment's reflection told her she could not do it without being excessively rude; and ere she could make up her mind about it, Mrs. and Miss Willis were at her side—the mother and daughter, you will, perhaps, recollect, who had paid her a farewell visit ere she left home for Paris, almost two years ago.

"My dear Anne," began Mrs. Willis, "I thought you meant to stay in your pew ready for the evening service! I waited at your usual door, and you must have come out by another. How is your dear mother?"

"Not much stronger, I fear," replied Anne, struggling for composure; the Willises were not people to whom she could wish to show her heart. "She does not 'get on,' as people say."

Mrs. Willis shook her head.

"Ah, my dear, I am afraid, I am sadly afraid——!" But she did not say of what she was afraid, because Eleanor pinched her arm, and whispered, "Hush, mamma! take care what you say." But Anne, who heard the whisper, knew pretty well how the sentence might have ended.

"You must give her plenty of good things!" pursued Mrs. Willis, taking her daughter's hint, and speaking more cheerfully; "plenty of *Liebig*—though I don't know but what the good old-fashioned beef-tea is best; but everybody cries up *Liebig* now—and isinglass, and gravy soup, and *very* old port, and the best Madeira, and all that sort of thing, you know! And a little game is nice for an invalid, and grouse and partridges are both in, though rather dear; but that does not matter to *you*, of course."

Anne did not notice the emphasis on the personal pronoun, which referred rather to her father than to

herself; but she smiled, thinking how her mother could swim, if she wished it, in any wine she cared for, and how a whole *battue* of birds was at her disposal, if only she could be prevailed upon to eat them.

"Grapes have a good deal of nourishment in them," continued Mrs. Willis; "and they are so cooling. I always cry out for grapes when I am ill. And I have such a nice recipe for grape-jelly somewhere; I'll look it up, Anne, my dear, and Eleanor shall copy it for you."

"Thank you. I almost think cook made some yesterday. We are, of course, anxious to get anything that mother may fancy, but the worst of it is, she only tastes a little bit not to disappoint us; nothing seems to tempt her appetite."

"Ah, my dear! *Ah—h!*" And again Mrs. Willis shook her head, and looked like a nineteenth-century Cassandra, in her Sunday-best. Poor Anne, whose spirit had been so chastened, so solemnised, a few minutes before, could have beaten the commonplace, though not unkindly, woman for that ominous, long-drawn "*ah—h!*" Some people, with the very best intentions, only irritate and torture where they mean to sympathise. But there was worse to come. Again Mrs. Willis took up her parable: "Anne, my dear, has your dear mother seen our dear pastor?"

"No," returned Anne, sharply; "mother has seen no one besides ourselves, except Mrs. Rayner, for a few minutes."

"Mrs. Rayner is a very worldly woman."

Anne had to put great force upon herself in order to restrain her tongue, for she was really attached to her mother's friend, and knew her for a simple-minded, unselfish Christian lady, far, far before her censor in the heavenward journey. She was wise enough to make no answer; she felt intuitively that in such a case, though speech *might* be silvern, silence was gold undoubtedly. So Mrs. Willis resumed: "Don't you think, dear, I might call? If your dear mother is so near her latter end—mind! I don't for a moment say it is so, for while there is life there is hope—*always*, you know; but her symptoms, we must confess, *appear* to be very serious. If it

should be God's will to take her, she ought to be prepared. I cannot but think of her immortal soul, my dear Anne."

"She wants no preparation," replied Anne, almost choking as she spoke. "Her soul is safe with God. She does not believe in preparing for death—*neither do I!*" The last sentence was spoken with some vehemence.

"Ah, my dear, you have youth and strength. But you remember the hymn, 'Oft as the bell with solemn toll'? Make your peace with God now, and then you need not dread a dying hour."

"I don't like talking of God in that way, as if He were my enemy. As for mother—well, she is *all* peace! She would not say she had *made* her peace with God, but she would tell you that she had found peace in Him many years ago."

"But there's a false peace, you know, Anne. I hope you have not contracted Popish or Rationalistic notions on the Continent? A foreign education has its advantages, of course; but there's a snare in it—ah, many a snare! I am thankful to know my Eleanor has sat always under the pure Gospel."

"*Mamma, don't,*" interrupted Eleanor, who pitied Anne from the bottom of her heart.

Anne replied, "I hope I have learned nothing wrong. I am sure I am right about mother, and her peace is of the only true kind, I know."

"Ah, but she should search herself and humble herself. Oh, my dear! when we come to our death-bed—"

But here Anne's patience and her calmness took flight together, and, swallowing down her tears by a desperate effort, she replied: "As you were never on your death-bed, Mrs. Willis, you can only know what you have heard; and I hope, when you come to die, you will be as happy and as ready to go to God as my dear mother is at this moment."

And before Mrs. Willis could make any rejoinder, she had turned into another road, and was almost out of sight ere the astonished lady could draw breath. Of course, she decided in her own mind that Anne was a

very ill-behaved young person and "unregenerate," as it was much to be feared poor Mrs. Wreford was.

Next day Anne waylaid Dr. Rayner, and, drawing him into the dining-room, asked him without any preamble whether her mother ever would get well. His answer came frankly, though kindly. He had come downstairs thinking that the time had arrived when the husband and daughter ought to know the truth. "My dear," he said, gently, laying his hand on her shoulder, "I cannot tell you—I wish I could—that your mother will get better."

The answer was just what Anne had expected, and yet when it came it seemed too terrible to be true. "Are you sure—*quite* sure?" she asked, in a sort of suppressed agony that excited the good Doctor's pity more than any loud demonstration of distress. "Can nothing be done?"

"Nothing that will be of the least avail, I am afraid."

"But she may live a long while yet; and if she does not suffer much—?" Anne could not proceed. Dr. Rayner's silence and the expression of his face spoke more emphatically than words, and she knew that the end was near—oh, how near? She had hoped it was a question of years, or of months at least. Since Saturday she had dreaded lest it might only be of weeks; now she knew it was but of days—perhaps of hours only.

"Let me know the worst," she gasped. "How long will it last?"

"That is more than I can tell you, my dear; there may be one more revival, or there may not. There is a great change since yesterday even; the whole physical structure seems to be on the verge of collapse, and she will grow weaker every hour."

"But she is on the sofa to-day?"

"And she may be there almost to the last, if she is gently lifted from her bed; the change is good for her—I mean pleasant. As long as she do not faint, she may be safely moved."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PILGRIM OF THE NIGHT.

THIS was on Monday, and on Wednesday Catherine declined to leave her bed, and Dr. Rayner had said that she must not be urged, or even persuaded, to the least exertion from which she shrank. He saw that she was sinking rapidly, and he feared lest, by the slightest excitement or fatigue, the end might be precipitated. And Robert knew now that his wife—his sweet, gentle, loving Catherine—was dying; that her tired feet already touched the cold, dark stream, which all must pass ere they gain the land of rest. He went to Fenchurch Street on Thursday, and made such arrangements as enabled him to absent himself from business for the next few days. Then he returned home, determined not again to leave Ivyside till all was over. He trembled even to think what might have taken place during the three hours which had elapsed since his departure by an early train.

All that day Catherine lay in a kind of lethargy, from which they knew they must not rouse her; and as the evening and the night passed, and the next morning came, and there was no change, both Robert and Anne began to be afraid that she would speak to them nevermore. Jane—still her mistress's faithful attendant—told the servants downstairs, “There she lies just like a sleeping child, and looking as innocent and as pretty as one; and she'll go on sleeping, sleeping, you'll see, and go off as quietly at last as a blessed baby that the angels are waiting for.”

But it was not so to be. On Friday afternoon Catherine opened her eyes, and seemed to awake thoroughly. She asked for some wine and water, and even took a little meat-jelly, “quite comfortable,” as Anne triumphantly declared. For one moment a thrill of hope ran through her weary heart—for one moment only; the next instant

she remembered that Dr. Rayner, and the physician whom he had insisted on being once more consulted, had both foretold a return of full consciousness, and even of renewed strength and revived spirits, at the very last. They had said—"The change for the better will probably be about twenty hours before the final change of all."

Late that night, as Robert sat by his wife's bedside, with her thin hand softly clasped in his, she asked—and it was wonderful how clearly and easily she spoke—"Where is Anne?"

"Anne is lying down on her own bed, dearest; she was worn out, and I almost forced her to go. I promised I would call her the instant you wanted her."

"I do not want her; let her sleep, dear child. I like to be alone with you, Robert. Do you know, dear, I am so happy?"

"Are you, love? I am glad of that."

"Yes, and I have had such pleasant dreams. I thought I had really died, and was in heaven; but the streets were not of gold—they were streets just like earthly streets, only so clean and bright, and the air so pure and sweet; and there were trees—such stately trees! those on the Paris boulevards are nothing to them. And all the people, as they went to and fro, seemed full of joy, and presently I heard singing; it was 'The Pilgrims of the Night' I heard, to the tune to which we always sing it. I could hear the very words:—

" 'Hark! hark, my soul! angelic songs are swelling
O'er earth's green fields and ocean's wave-beat shore:
How sweet the truth those blessed strains are telling
Of that new life when sin shall be no more.
Angels of Jesus, angels of light,
Singing to welcome the pilgrims of the night.'

And then I saw a white-robed choir, and some of them were angels and some were saints, with palms in their hands; and again I listened, as they sang:—

" 'Rest comes at length: though life be long and dreary,
The day must dawn, and darksome night be passed;
Faith's journey ends in welcome to the weary,
And heaven, the heart's true home, will come at last.'

And I wondered whether the saints and the 'angels of Jesus' could hear the hymns they were singing down below, and I listened, and *I could* hear them, and I said to myself, 'It is all one family—the Church above and the Church below, it is all one.' And then, while I still thought, there came upon my ears a burst of song, like nothing that I can describe; only fancy great ocean waves breaking on a rock-bound shore, and great cathedral organs, and grand distant thunder, and far-off, melodious, pealing bells, and the 'Hallelujah Chorus' sounding through it all! And I knew I was listening to the everlasting song."

"I think you will soon hear it, darling; and it will be no dream."

"If only you and Anne could go with me! But no! I ought not to wish it, you have both your work to do in the world; when the right time comes we shall be altogether again. I know, now, more than ever, that whether in heaven or on earth, we are but *one family*; and God is the great Father, and some hold His right hand and some His left, but all will be face to face—some day! We don't know how soon."

"Catherine, you quite forgive me?"

"For what, dear?"

"For the unkindness that has slowly killed you; for the neglect, the cruelty, the selfish inconsideration which has laid on you burdens heavier than you could bear."

"Hush, dear, hush! I have nothing to forgive. I loved you always, ever since that happy Sunday afternoon when we first walked together after Sunday-school—more than twenty-seven years ago. It seems to me both a long time and a short time since that day—if you understand! But I have never ceased to love you; I thought sometimes I would *try*, but it was of no use, I could not really change."

"Neither have I ever changed at heart, Catherine; only I have been hard and selfish and puffed-up and foolish, and Mammon—success in life has been my god, my *Moloch*, to whom, I fear, I have sacrificed you, my true and faithful wife."

"Don't think that, dear. My time was come, and God

called me. And, Robert, I do think I was not quite the wife for you ; you ought to have married a lady."

" What lady would have married poor Robert Wreford, a raw, country lad, come up to town to make his fortune —like a thousand others, whose fortunes were never made ? What had I to offer a *lady* ? I wonder I had the presumption to speak to you, who were far more of a gentlewoman than I a gentleman. We were well matched, Catherine, in station and in circumstances—only—only a worldly spirit overcame me, a very devil of ambition took possession of me, and I was vexed that you would not, or rather could not, go at the same pace as myself."

" Dear, a man ought to do the best he can for himself, and, perhaps, I should have roused myself earlier. But I was too ready to go in grooves, too fond of the beaten track. Nor was I fitted for the position which I have had of late to fill ; I had so little education ; I was continually feeling my inferiority to the ladies with whom I associated ; you see, dear, I never was clever, I could not so easily accommodate myself to our altered circumstances as you could. I deplored it, but I could not help myself. 'The worst was, I knew I must be a drag upon your career.'

Robert groaned, remembering the day when he had told her that she was " not strong enough for the place." " Say no more, Catherine," he said ; " as you love me, do not excuse me by deprecating yourself. For weeks past I have been face to face with my true self—my heartless, vain, contemptible self."

" Nay, dear, I never thought you heartless ; though I must confess there have been times when I fancied—I know now it was only foolish fancy—that you had ceased to love me. It was my fault ; it is a woman's fault to be too exacting. I read somewhere, about a year ago, that a woman's whole story was love ; while in man's life love was but an episode ! If I had my time over again I think I should understand you,—I should understand all good men better than I have done."

" One thing I must say, dear. I never did cease to love you, though I do not wonder that you thought so. Oh, Catherine, if I could but make it up to you ! If you would but recover, what happy days we might have yet !"

"It may not be, dearest; and it is well. And—don't be vexed, Robert, I think I had better say it—I should like you, in a little while, to marry again; to marry a woman who was born in the station to which we have risen; a woman who knows, and always has known, the usages of society; one who can hold her own, nor feel as if she were perpetually walking on stilts, in her efforts to demean herself as a fashionable lady. Only, don't marry any one whom you cannot trust to do well by my Anne; that is all I ask, dear."

"For mercy's sake, Catherine, do not speak of your possible, or rather impossible, successor! No, I will never marry again; no other woman shall ever be my wife."

"Just as you will, dearest. Only remember, if you should wish to make another choice, that I hoped you would love and be loved again. Don't forget that when the time comes, as I feel sure it will. And one thing more, Robert. I charge you not to let the love of wealth and position slay your soul. You know the oft-quoted text, 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?' I have feared sometimes, knowing you as only a wife can know the husband whom she loves, that your soul—the soul that once cherished heavenly things, and delighted in God's service—was languishing and sick almost to death. If the soul wanders from God, it is lost, for it has missed its way, and the man—the best part of him—is as good as dead. Don't wander so far, Robert, that we cannot meet again when you, too, have done with earth. There is no harm in growing rich and important. The harm is in forgetting Him from whom every good thing comes. When you are drinking of life's sweetest, most sparkling springs, do not forget the Fountain that never fails."

And as the night wore on, Robert kept his lonely vigil still. Catherine slept, or seemed to sleep, quite naturally. He sat by the bedside, his face buried in his hands, re-tracing, step by step, his career ever since the day when, a mere lad, he entered into the service of Bright and Hanks. God had wonderfully prospered him; he had succeeded in everything he undertook. People somewhat enviously said of him, "Wreford has certainly found out

the philosopher's stone; all that he touches turns to gold!" And he had been greatly blessed in wife and child, especially in his wife—as sweet and true a woman as ever lived. Yes! home joys and worldly success, health and strength of body and of mind, a good name without the least blot upon it, all sorts of comforts and luxuries and delights, had been vouchsafed him, and what had he rendered in return to the Giver of all these precious gifts?

"Ah, what? Conscience spoke, and spoke loudly; for at last Robert Wreford beheld himself as in a glass, and he knew that he had sinned grievously against God, and against the gentle companion whom God had given him.

"I have killed her," he moaned to himself, while the wild autumnal blast rushed by, and shook the windows, and swept the sere leaves to the ground. "She would not be here now if I had loved and cherished her as I vowed to do. I loved her as well as my selfish heart could love—Thou knowest that, my God!—but I did not *cherish* her. I vexed her and crossed her, and hurt her by my hard words, and I chilled her tender spirit by my coldness, till her poor heart had no more strength. God be merciful to me a sinner!"

That was the last conversation he ever had with Catherine. When she awoke, she smiled, and said she was refreshed; but she was evidently weaker. And as the morning broke there was an alteration in her countenance; her voice sank to a whisper, and she could not swallow but with ever-increasing difficulty. At last she could take nothing, and they could only moisten her pale lips with wine. The day wore on, and when the evening shadows fell they knew that the end was very close at hand. They lighted the lamp, and she never knew it; she still said she could not see the dear faces that were bending over her. She could feel their hands, and hear their voices; but she could hear other voices, too; and once she whispered, as if to herself, "Hark! hark, my soul! angelic sounds are ringing." And on her pale face was "the light that never shone on sea or land."

"Is it Sunday yet?" she asked once, in a bewildered way.

And Robert replied, "No, love; it is Saturday night still."

"Saturday night still!" was her reply. "And the work is all done, and the pain and the sorrow have ceased for ever. But, Robert, the sun is rising over the mountains—I know they must be mountains, though I never saw any—it *must* be Sunday morning! Look! how bright it is! Ah! and the angels of Jesus are singing—don't you hear them? They are singing to welcome 'the pilgrims of the night.' Kiss me, Anne—kiss me, my own husband. Yes, O Lord Christ—I *come to Thee*."

And without a sigh or a struggle, and with the lovely, unearthly light still on her face, Catherine went home.

She was no longer a "Pilgrim of the Night."

CHAPTER XXVI.

ANNE'S FRIENDS AND COMFORTERS.

CATHERINE was laid to rest in a quiet, sunny nook of Abney Park Cemetery; the fuss of the funeral was all over; the household was decently attired in mourning; things began insensibly to return to their accustomed routine; Mr. Wreford once more betook himself by early train to Fenchurch Street; and Anne was left alone at Ivyside to bear her sorrow as best she could.

Now that there was no more nursing, no sick-room in which to keep loving vigil, her occupation seemed gone. There would be enough to do presently, no doubt; but, meanwhile, she scarcely knew in what way to employ herself. There were her studies, of course, but she could not resume them just yet; she tried in vain to settle her mind to reading; as for the piano, she felt too listless to do more than let her fingers wander idly over the keys, playing hymn-tunes and chants and snatches of mournful

melodies ; she could not yet bear the sound of merry music. Even the organ-man, who came as usual into the drive, playing her favourite "Mabel Valse," or the overture to "La Grande Duchesse," to which she had always listened before with pleasure, was ordered away before he had ground through the first half-dozen bars of his opening strain. The lively airs sounded to her almost profane under those walls, which had so lately enclosed that precious form now mingling with the dust. The servants, so far, needed no interference, and they seemed to be gradually recovering their spirits, for once or twice Anne heard cheerful talking and subdued laughter proceeding from their own quarters. At the first moment she felt displeased—angry even ; but the next her common sense told her that she could not expect continuous sorrow from those who had only lost a mistress—mistresses being plentiful enough ; while she herself had lost a mother—the sole mother she could ever know.

What was to be her own destiny, she never asked herself ; though all her friends out-of-doors and the talkative servants downstairs were wondering when she would return to school, or if she would return at all ; and what her father would do with her for the next two or three years, as she was yet quite too young to be placed at the head of his table. Mrs. Willis especially concerned herself on the subject of Anne's future, and was anxious that prudent arrangements should be made for her benefit. Several other ladies were also quite ready to advise and sympathise with "poor, dear Mr. Wreford." Indeed, I am not sure that these kind creatures were not really more interested in Robert than in his daughter. Never, in all his life before, had he been the theme of so much grave discussion.

About a fortnight after Catherine's death occurred the monthly meeting of the "Ladies' Working Society for Missionary Objects," connected with the church to which the Wrefords belonged. They met at each other's houses, and it was Mrs. Willis's turn to receive the ladies this month. You may be sure there was a good deal to be said on this occasion which had no reference to needles and cotton. There was no scandal talked, as a rule, I am

happy to say ; nor was common-place gossip at all rife among them. But still, it was natural that, now and then, their neighbours should come in for a little kindly criticism—especially in the tea-hour, when hands and thoughts were free, and tongues were loosened under the mild excitement of “the cup that cheers, but not inebriates.” Mrs. Willis herself opened the subject, as she sat with all her best china and her silver tea-kettle before her : “Mrs. Parker, how did you think the Wrefords looked on Sunday? I thought they bore up pretty well.”

“Poor things!” replied the lady appealed to. “It was very sad to see them in their deep black, and in the pew without *her*.”

“It would have been *very* odd to see them there *with* her, ma, all things considered,” interposed Miss Fanny Parker—a flippant young lady, just out of her teens.

No one replied ; every one felt that this speech was sadly *malapropos* ; but Fauny Parker, the youngest of her mother’s numerous brood of daughters, was one of those luckless young women who are always saying the wrong thing at the wrong time and in the wrong place, and her foible, being well known, did not excite so much severe remark as might have been expected. Her mother resumed : “I could scarcely catch a glimpse of Anne’s features, under that thick veil ; but I thought poor Mr. Wreford looked beautifully resigned.”

“Resigned, indeed!” burst out Miss Clapper, the cantankerous old maid, who objected to men, and especially married men, on principle. “No doubt he’s resigned ; they always are! And I’m sure he didn’t make much account of her while she lived, poor dear! It’s all very well to put crape round your hat to the very crown, and to wear jet studs, and flourish a new white handkerchief, and keep your eyes fixed on your hymn-book—they all do that when they are left disconsolate widowers ; and before their mourning’s grown half shabby, they are courting another woman. Ugh!”

Miss Clapper’s little idiosyncrasy on the subject of the faithless sex being quite as patent in that community as Miss Fanny Parker’s sad tendency to infelicitous observations, very little rejoinder was provoked ; only one

or two of the matrons present bridled a little and smiled at each other, and one of them remarked, that she would rather be mourned for a brief season than die and leave *no one* to mourn her at all, as was sometimes the case with elderly unmarried ladies!

"He will marry again, of course," said some one, who was busily disposing of buttered scones and mulberry-jam.

"Of course," interposed Mrs. Parker. "Why should he not?—in good time, that is. I think a man who, being in circumstances to marry, persistently remains a widower, is little less than impious! It is as if he were upbraiding Providence for its dealings with him, obstinately refusing possible happiness which has been ordained for him. Besides, I think it is a great compliment to a departed wife when a man is anxious to marry again speedily. It proves that he has once found happiness in wedded life, or he would not be solicitous to try it again."

"Or it may be," said another of the seven Misses Parker, "that, having been once unfortunate, he is anxious to try his luck again. He may think that Providence, having frowned on his first attempt, may possibly smile on his second venture."

The young ladies of this family, you perceive, had a general tendency to make remarks which were not altogether in good taste.

"I do not see what else a man can do, under certain circumstances, *but* make a second choice—always provided it be a prudent one," was Mrs. Parker's *dictum*. "Of course, a decent time must elapse; there is nothing more to be deprecated than indecent haste; and then, he—the widower—cannot do better than marry again—*wisely*, of course."

"What would you call 'wisely'?" asked a young married lady, who was not quite pleased at all this talk on second marriages.

"What would I call 'wisely'?" replied the matron. "Why, marrying a woman of suitable age, of well-known antecedents, of acknowledged good principles, of respectable connections."

"That qualification of 'suitable age' might be variously explained, though," responded the first speaker. "One

man might think he had done judiciously in selecting a lady very little, if at all, his junior. Another might imagine that he was doing precisely the right thing in marrying a girl who, from her age, might have been his daughter."

"By suitable age, I mean, of course, pretty nearly equal age; and I call a woman of thirty-five of equal age with a man of forty. The wife should always be the junior. If a man of fifty-five were to marry a woman of forty-five, that would be a very suitable alliance."

"The whole thing," said another lady, who had not yet spoken, "resolves itself into a question of mere circumstances. A childless widower is certainly at liberty to please himself; he can wed sweet seventeen, if he chooses, or a widow of mature years and grave experience, if that should meet his view; and no one would have any right to censure him, even though the widow were palpably his senior, and the maid his junior. But when there is a family, the case is altogether different. I can never exonerate a father who gives his children an unsuitable step-mother. Now Mr. Wreford has a daughter."

"Yes," said Mrs. Willis, vigorously filling the cups as she spoke; "and if I were a candidate for matrimonial honours I should look twice before I consented to become the second Mrs. Wreford, I can promise you. That girl will be a thorn in the side of any step-mother; why! she is little more than fourteen, and she gives her opinion as though she were twenty. As to her religion, I should not wonder if she is secretly a Papist—a poor, benighted Papist! You should have heard how she answered me the other Sunday—just a week before her poor mother died; it was when I was speaking to her a little faithfully on her mother's spiritual state! But Papist or Protestant, or neither, she has theological views of her own, it is certain; and, I should say, not sound—not sound, by any means! If she should propose to join the church, I shall think it my duty to confer with our pastor on the subject."

"Mamma," interrupted Eleanor, "I think you judge poor Anne too hardly; she was in an agony of mind that

Sunday; she could not bear to hear her mother spoken of as dying!"

"Which showed, my dear, a most unchristian state of mind; resignation, you know, is one of the essentials of *true* Christianity. You know those beautiful lines—we will sing them before we part, dear friends:—

" ' If thou shouldst call me to resign
What most I prize, it ne'er was mine;
I only yield Thee what is Thine;
Thy will be done! '

That is the spirit in which a believer should contemplate bereavement. And Anne Wreford was clearly in a state of rebellion because she perceived that God was about to take her mother from her."

"Mamma," said Eleanor again, "I don't think Anne Wreford makes any profession of religion, so she can scarcely be judged by the standard of professors. I am sure I felt very sorry for her; I think it had only just dawned upon her that her mother was actually dying, and though she is so tall and womanly, she is but a child, you know. I fancy she hardly knew what she was saying."

"Perhaps not; but, making all possible excuses for her, nothing could justify her in speaking to an elder as she spoke to me. I never did approve of foreign education for girls."

"Why, mamma, you were wild to send me to a Paris school two years ago, when Anne first went; but papa grudged the expense, and would not hear of it."

"You know nothing at all about it, Eleanor; and you may be sure if you had been sent to France at all, it would have been to a Protestant school, where Papists were not admitted, and where you would have been under proper Christian influences."

"I do not believe such a school could be found in Paris, mamma. There are English schools, I dare say, in France, just as there are so-called French schools in England; but they would be of little benefit, and one might as well stop at home and save one's money."

"My dear, you know nothing about it, I repeat. I must request you to say no more. When I was young,

girls were not expected to give their opinions unasked, and I should have been quite shocked at the idea of arguing with my own mother. I maintain that a foreign education is a great snare, and that Anne Wreford has already suffered from pernicious influences. Also, I am very much afraid from what I hear that poor dear Mrs. Wreford herself was not in that sweet state of mind which ought to pervade a Christian death-bed."

"There I think you are quite mistaken," said the pastor's wife, who hitherto had not spoken. "My husband saw Mrs. Wreford several days before she died—"

"Oh, then, he did see her, after all?" rather rudely interrupted Mrs. Willis.

"He did see her," calmly pursued Mrs. Kendrick, "and he came back full of wonder and joy at what he had heard and seen. He said she just lay waiting in peace her Saviour's summons. Her feet were on the Rock of Ages; her soul seemed already to have crossed the mysterious sea which flows between this world and the next. She was as a loving child going home to her Father's house, and seeing afar off the lights shining in the windows of that home. 'She taught me,' said my husband, with tears in his eyes; 'I could neither console nor exhort. She wanted no words of mine, nor of any human teacher. The Lord was manifestly with her, and the sting of death was taken away.'"

There was a silence of several minutes after Mrs. Kendrick ceased to speak. Some present thought, perhaps, of how it would be with them when they, too, should be standing on the threshold of another life. Some, it may be, remembered Catherine's simple, consistent testimony to the faith she so humbly professed; and others called to mind her earnest and unobtrusive work, so long as opportunity had been afforded; all seemed subdued, as if the memory of their lost friend were sweet and hallowed; only Mrs. Willis—who was one of those very unpleasant Christians who require that everybody's Christianity shall be of their own type and of precisely the same pattern—shook her head gravely, and replied, "'By their fruits ye shall know them.' I must confess that it appeared to me

that Mrs. Wreford led a very worldly life of late, and I never thought her a spiritually-minded person."

"What is your definition of a spiritually-minded person?" asked Mrs. Kendrick. All waited to hear Mrs. Willis's reply.

Now, if there was anything in the world that Mrs. Willis detested, it was being called upon to define her own assertions, or to justify her opinions. She liked her *dictum* to be unquestioned, of whatsoever nature it might be, and she considered herself to be one of the most experienced Christians in the circles she frequented; but as an answer was evidently expected, she said, with an air of great solemnity, "I do not think, dear Mrs. Kendrick, that I need explain what is meant by a spiritually-minded person, for all present are, I believe, members of the Church, and must—or, at least, should—come under that description. The spiritual mind, you know, approves the things of God; the carnal mind loves the world, and the things of the world, and is enmity against God. And does not the apostle declare that 'to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace'?"

"Undoubtedly," returned Mrs. Kendrick. "I think we all know so much—in theory, at least. But different people have very different standards. I may think a person spiritually minded whom you deem to be a mere lip-professor, and *vice versa*. I only wished to know what are the signs by which you discriminate spiritual-mindedness, which I take to be the equivalent of true godliness."

"Mrs. Kendrick," returned Mrs. Willis, "I am no scholar, no theologian; I only know what my Bible says. I am not accustomed to argue points of religion; I leave that to the learned. I only know that we are to set our affections upon things above, not on things on the earth. If we do *that*, we are spiritually minded."

And Mrs. Willis smiled, feeling that at last she had clenched the point, and that her assertion was unanswerable in that company, where everybody, of course, held fast to the New Testament. But all present felt that their hostess had entirely evaded the question; she had only quoted certain texts which were patent to all; she evidently

avoided compromising herself by giving the definition Mrs. Kendrick had asked for; yet it was scarcely polite to press the matter any further at her own table. And again Mrs. Willis, with edifying simplicity, reiterated, "I only know what my Bible says."

"And that says, '*Judge not, that ye be not judged!*'" The speaker was a venerable lady, greatly respected, and much deferred to by many who were present. "When our Lord said, 'By their fruits ye shall know them,' He never meant that we were to sit in judgment upon each other. If you turn to the chapter in which the words occur—the same chapter, by the way, which commences with '*Judge not*'—you will find that our blessed Lord, in desiring His disciples to judge of men, as of trees, by their fruits, was warning them against false prophets, or what we should call false teachers. It would be, indeed, the 'child on the judgment-seat,' if we should dare to pass sentence on our fellow-Christians who did not think precisely as we think, and who could not frame their lives on the model of our own. Let us not presume to weigh others in the Almighty balance with our own scales, which must always be defective. I think, my dear friends, we are all guilty in this respect; it is one of the blemishes of the modern Christian Church, that its members—yes, its true and faithful members—are too apt to be beholding the mote that is in their brother's eye, considering not the beam that is in their own. When our own vineyards are in perfect order, when not a weed or noisome plant remains, when every corner is well tilled, when our vines are laden with the richest clusters—then, and not till then, may we blame our neighbour, because we think we see in his vineyard straggling branches, unbroken clods, and, worst of all, *wild grapes*."

Again there was silence, for Mrs. Stanbury's words went home to many hearts. The old lady was counted a mother in Israel—as, indeed, she was—and even Mrs. Willis could not venture on the remonstrance, or, rather, the reprimand, which would have been the fate of any other speaker. How true it is that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump! Mrs. Stanbury's few mild, wise utterances changed the spirit of the entire assemblage, and

they began to talk more like Christian women met to edify each other, than as the chatterers they might have passed for before.

“ You are quite right,” said another lady; “ we are continually passing judgment on others, and thereby provoking our own condemnation. It is a blessed thing that God sees with other eyes than ours, and that He sees a life or an event in its entirety; not as we see it, here a piece, and there a piece, and perhaps through magnifying glasses, or through spectacles of prejudice.”

“ Just so,” returned Mrs. Stanbury; “ we *cannot* judge wholly, and we are far too fond of those magnifying glasses of which you speak, Mrs. Richmond. You know the hackneyed simile of the wrong end of the telescope turned towards our faults, and the other end used for the examination of our neighbours’? This is certainly not loving one’s neighbour as oneself! We forget, alas! that *love is the fulfilling of the law.*”

“ But surely we are bound to be faithful? ” urged Mrs. Willis.

“ Oh, yes; only let us first be faithful to ourselves. Let our faithfulness be kindness; let us speak the truth in *love*. If we speak it not in *love*, I believe we had better hold our peace, lest we offend one of Christ’s little ones, and bring upon ourselves the woe denounced against those who are too prone to judge, too ready to condemn.”

“ And that reminds me,” said Mrs. Richmond, “ that while we expect the *idle words* that men speak to be brought against them, we seldom concern ourselves about the hasty words, the unkind words, the bitter words, that are so often spaken. Surely these must be more harmful even than the *idle words*? ”

“ Don’t you think that all such words may come under the category of ‘ *idle words*,’ just as all sorts of husks may be classed as chaff, as opposed to grain? May not the term ‘ *idle words*,’ as used in a Scriptural sense, be interpreted to mean *all* such words as a Christian should not speak—that they are *idle*, inasmuch as they are to no good purpose? ”

“ And how about the words we leave *unspoken*—the

words of kindness, of peace, of comfort?—all the good words which we ought to speak and do not?"

"Alas! alas!" said the old lady, solemnly, "when we think of all we have left undone, as well as of all we have done, we can only cry for pardon, and comfort ourselves with remembering that 'there is forgiveness with Him'; we can only supplicate, 'Deal not with us after our sins.'"

Tea being over, the report of the society was read, and then a book was brought forward, according to custom, and Eleanor Willis was asked to be the reader, while the other ladies sewed. Strangely enough, the subject which had been under discussion cropped up again in course of reading, and Eleanor had to give the following quotation:—

"Judge not; the workings of his brain
And of his heart thou canst not see;
What looks to thy dim eyes a stain,
In God's pure light may only be
A scar, brought from some well-won field,
Where thou wouldest only faint and yield."

No more was said about the Wrefords just then, but afterwards, when most of the ladies were gone, and only two or three remained putting away the work and arranging for the next meeting, Mrs. Willis said: "Mrs. Stanbury need not have taken me up so curtly as she did this evening. I'm sure I should be the last to sit in judgment on any one, and I have no doubt poor Mrs. Wreford was a sincere Christian, and lived up to her lights; but there are some, you know, whose lights do not burn brightly—some who, anomalous as it may seem, are classed as worldly Christians!"

"Which Mrs. Wreford was *not*, Mrs. Willis," was the unexpected reply of a young lady, who had known Catherine for the last two years. "I never talked to Mrs. Wreford but I felt the better for it; it was better than any sermon to be with her; she was one of those 'living epistles' of which our pastor was speaking the other evening. She just *lived* her religion, she did not discourse upon it."

"Ah, well! I am only too happy to hear you say so," was Mrs. Willis's reply, though her tone was scarcely that

of conviction. But she began to perceive that public opinion was not with her, and so she prudently resolved to leave unsaid a great deal which she had it in her mind to say, and which she actually did say when alone with her husband and her daughter. Let us hope there are not many Mrs. Willises, though she was a type of others of her class, who deny the Christian name to those who cannot swallow all their sayings, who will not trim their lamps in accordance with certain regulations, and who, above all things, refuse their *Shibboleths*.

Then the conversation reverted to Anne, and how she ought at once to be sent back to school, as it must be so bad for a girl of her age being left so much her own mistress. And one would advise that, and another something else, and a third hoped this afflicting dispensation would be blessed to her soul—as it really was, only not at all in the way which the speaker intended. Anne ought to have been greatly obliged to her acquaintances, who took so much interest, and were quite ready to undertake any kind of trouble, on her behalf; but I fear she would not have felt particularly grateful had she heard all, or even half, that was said that evening concerning her present affairs and her future welfare. It is a good thing often, for our own peace' sake, that we do not know how people's tongues are going about us, even when nothing unkindly is intended, and all is meant in good faith and charity. Ill betide the birds of the air, who chatter on the wing what they should not whisper even in their nests!

But one great good resulted from what had passed in Mrs. Willis's well-filled drawing-room. When Mrs. Stanbury got home that night, her niece, Maria Merrick, who had not accompanied her, noticed that she looked tired—or, as she herself expressed it, "quite fagged out."

"And well I may be fagged, Maria," was the old lady's reply. "When one breathes a vitiated atmosphere, one cannot help being tired. Uncharitable discourse and self-opinionated narrow-mindedness are enough to weary any one. There has Mrs. Willis been condemning poor Mrs. Wreford—though why I should say poor I am sure I don't know, seeing that she is far richer and infinitely more

blessed than any of us can hope to be just yet—there has our hostess of this evening been calling her worldly-minded and unspiritual ; and the woman, my dear, knows no more what true spirituality is than—well, I won't make comparisons, which are proverbially odious. But that is not all ; she has been finding terrible fault with little Miss Wreford, who, it appears, did not behave quite amiably the other day when Mrs. Willis addressed her on the subject of her dying mother's spiritual condition."

"It would be very hard, I should say," replied Maria, "to keep one's temper both outwardly and inwardly under any sort of exhortation from Mrs. Willis. I always give her a wide berth at all our meetings, because she invariably irritates me, and then I am vexed at myself, and humbled that I have so little self-control."

"Well, my dear, I think I will go and see this poor child—who, however, is not quite a child by all that I hear of her ; I should have thought from her looks she was eighteen at the least. I don't think intrusion generally is desirable at these times, and people nearly always make mistakes when they attempt to administer consolation, for 'the heart knoweth its own bitterness ;' we need no Solomon to tell us that, do we ? But I am an old woman, and I have known deep sorrow in my day—as you can testify, Maria—and perhaps she will listen to me ; at any rate, I can offer to be her friend when she needs one ; and she will need one ere long, poor girl, for there will be at least half-a-dozen women who will worry her with their censures, their counsel, and their ill-advised criticism. I think I may, perchance, do her a little good—I can but try. I will go to Ivyside to-morrow."

And Mrs. Stanbury kept her word, and she found Anne at home, though the maid who answered the door was not at all sure that Miss Wreford would see her. She had refused all callers, except Mrs. Markham and Mrs. Rayner—her mother's two closest friends. But it so happened that just then Anne came in from the garden, with some chrysanthemums in her hand, and saw Mrs. Stanbury on the hall-mat, talking to Lucy, and she could do nothing less than advance to speak to her. And then the kindly old face looked so very kind, so "grandmotherly," as

Anne said afterwards, that she felt quite a rush of confidence towards her, and she involuntarily asked her visitor into the dining-room.

Mrs. Stanbury was surprised at Anne's womanliness ; there was something in the grave, set composure of the sad young face that touched her to the heart, and, without more ado, she took the girl in her arms and kissed her tenderly. "Forgive me, my dear," she said ; "I am rather impulsive for an old woman, I am afraid ; but as I looked at you, I remembered a day—nearly sixty years ago now—when I wore a dress like this"—touching Anne's crêpe—"and for the same cause. Yes, it is more than sixty years since my dear mother went to God."

"What a long time !" said Anne, sighing, and wondering if she would have to live for sixty years without the love that had hitherto made life so sweet to her. Sixty years seems an age to a girl in her fifteenth year.

"It has not seemed so very long, my dear," said Mrs. Stanbury, cheerily. "Now, when I look back, it seems not long at all. I have always been busy, and, I think—yes, I am sure—I may say I have been happy, though many sorrows have been my portion ; and I have had many a care and many a crushing grief. Still, the good Lord brought me through all ; and here I am at seventy-four, a monument of His love and mercy, to testify that He has more than kept all His promises to me ; that He has never forsaken me, and that He is with me now in my old age, and will be with me to the end."

"I wonder how it feels to be so old, and to look back so long !" said Anne, thoughtfully.

"It feels very pleasant when you come to it, my dear ; all phases of life are good, and pleasant to those who love the Lord. Don't try to fancy now how it feels ; it's of no use—you can't. Why, you cannot at all realise how it will feel to be twenty or thirty ! It will come quite naturally at the right time ; God orders it all so beautifully. He gives us the brightness and the buoyancy of youth, the deeper joys blended with the deeper cares of maturity, the sweet, grave experiences of middle life, and the blessed peace of old age ; when one can say out of one's heart, 'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart

in peace!' God gives everything *in season*!—there are spring flowers and summer flowers and autumn flowers, and there are evergreens and berries for the winter. So there are hopes and fears and joys, and feelings peculiar to every stage of mortal life. All that God does is always natural."

"Death does not seem so very natural."

"No, it does not to those who remain; but I think it is always quite natural to those who go."

"It did seem quite natural to dear mother. She took it just as a matter of course when the time came. I could have fancied her soul just slipped into another life, as we go from one room into another."

"My child, you ought to thank God that she passed away from earth so calmly, so blessedly."

"I do, I do. But oh! that she should have passed at all! Am I very wicked, do you think, that I cannot quite say, '*Thy will be done*'? I sit and try to say it, and I do say it; but I am afraid not quite from my inmost heart. I used to be so fond of that hymn—that one beginning—'My God, my Father, while I stray,' you know; now I feel as if I could never sing it again—not all of it, that is."

"My child, you will sing it again; you will yet say from your heart of hearts, '*Thy will be done*.' And you can always, even now, sing the first verse—

"My God, my Father, while I stray
Far from my home on life's rough way,
Oh, teach me from my heart to say,
Thy will be done."

And the two last verses also—

"Renew my will from day to day,
Blend it with Thine, and take away
All that now makes it hard to say,
Thy will be done.

"Then when on earth I breathe no more
The prayer oft mixed with tears before,
I'll sing it on a happier shore—
Thy will be done."

As for the others, child, don't try to sing them now. I am not sure that any one,—except those who have lost all

earthly treasures, and those who don't know what loss means—*can* sing them sincerely. God is our Father. He is no cruel Inquisitor; He does not—I cannot think He does—wish us to yield in anticipation, as well as in reality, the joys and blessings which are His own sweet gifts. It is enough when the blow comes to submit cheerfully. What earthly parent would require a child, as the test of his dutiful affection, to say beforehand, ‘Father, however you may chastise me, whether you tell me the why and wherefore or not, I will kiss the rod and the hand that wields it’? Surely the parent would be well satisfied if the child, under the chastisement, did not rebel; or, if rebelling a little under the smart, soon came to acknowledge that the chastening was in love and for his good. And no father of our flesh, child, is half so merciful, half so tender, as our Heavenly Father. Never be afraid of God, Anne; be afraid of displeasing Him, of vexing His Holy Spirit; but never be afraid of God Himself. The child that nestles in its doting mother's arms has more need to be afraid than you in the firm embrace of your Father—God. Don't think I am preaching at you, child; I want to tell you what God is, as I have proved Him for five-and-fifty years—ay, for four-and-seventy years, for He loved me before I loved Him, and He was my Father, my Friend, my Saviour, although I knew it not.”

“Do you mean that it is fifty-five years since you were converted?”

“Yes; I was nineteen years old before I knew the Lord. May you know Him earlier, my dear! I hope you know Him *now*?”

“I am not sure, Mrs. Stanbury. At any rate, I am only just beginning to know Him.”

“Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord.’ That—is written.”

“Yes. But am I converted? I am afraid not.”

“Why are you afraid?”

“I have read such wonderful things about conversions. How a great change, as it were in the twinkling of an eye, came upon people. How they rejoiced! How they cast their sins away! How they sang ‘Happy day!

happy day ! ' How they *knew* they were born again ! Now, I have felt nothing like that."

" Nor need you ! though some souls do experience such sudden relief, such assurance, such rapture. No two lives are quite alike, you know ; neither are any two souls alike in spiritual experience. God deals quite differently with different temperaments. There is as much variety in the spiritual as in the natural world. All flowers are not lilies and roses—some are humble mignonette, and some are simple daisies of the field. All trees are not oaks or cedars of Lebanon—some are willows by the water-brooks, some are in rustic orchards, bearing common pears and apples for the market. There are even brambles by the wayside, graceful and useful in their position. What should we do without blackberries even though pineapples were plentiful ? So God's people are of all sorts, and differently made and moulded, and so variously affected by His Spirit's dealings with them. Only all show forth His praise, all live to His glory, all are intent upon His will being done on earth as in heaven, and all cry, ' Thy kingdom come ! ' and while they cry, they strive for its coming—in themselves and in the world. Do you *want* Christ's kingdom to come, my dear ? "

" Yes, I do ; for I can see that it is the only happy kingdom—the only kingdom that can endure when all else passes away."

" And which way are you looking ? "

" Which way—am I looking ? "

" Yes ! We always look the way we go, you know. You don't look east, if you are intent on going west. You wouldn't set your face towards Hampstead or Highgate, if your mind were bent on getting to Denmark Hill. Neither can any pilgrim to Zion travel thitherwards with his looks turned to Vanity Fair. Which way are you looking, child ? "

" I am looking to God ; I am sure of that. I read the other day that conversion means *turning*. Then I am turned—that is, I am not looking the way I used to look. My face is turned—the *other way*—towards God. I know that I would rather struggle along the road to Him, however rough and difficult it may be, than turn back and go

over the grass, and among the flowers—away from Him ! And as I get older I shall want to work for Him, and against the wickedness that is in the world. It will be up-hill labour, I know ; but God will help me, won't He ? ”

“ God will always help you. It is His joy to help the humble-minded, patient strivers. Only, remember, dear, that it is by *His* strength you climb ; not by your own, which may fail you any hour. Trust only to yourself, and you soon stumble and fall. And there is one other thing : the road to God is not a grand, solitary avenue ; it is life's common thoroughfare, the daily path beset with thorns and flowers. And you need God in the little difficulties of the way, as well as in the great ones. Keep close to Him, whether you are troubled about some petty matter, or beset with a great life trouble. Follow after Him in the sunshine, and when the darkness comes, as come it will, feel for His hand, although you cannot see His face.”

“ Thank you ! You have done me so much good, Mrs. Stanbury. Now I seem to see my way before me, just a little. And what I don't see God sees, and I think He will make it all right.”

“ That He will. And now I want to know if you will come and see me sometimes ? ”

“ I will, indeed, if I may. I can come any evening, for father does not come home till late—some nights it is very late ; business keeps him, you know.”

“ How is your father ? ”

“ Pretty well, I think. But he is very, very sad ! It is such a little while, you see ; and I never had any idea how much he loved mother, till just before she died. I fancy he does not like to come home and find her place vacant. I saw him, only last night, sit and look at her empty chair, and his eyes were full of tears. I wanted to comfort him, but I did not know how, and I have felt myself how it hurts to have people—that don't know—try to comfort you. And, of course, I don't understand what father feels ; I have heard mother say that even good children don't know what husband and wife are to each other.”

“ They don't know. Husband and wife that are truly one are so much one, that their parting is like the sever-

ance of body and soul. You cannot be to your father what your mother was, yet you may be to him all that a daughter can be. But you are too young to be leaving school just yet. Shall you return to Paris after Christmas?"

"I do not know; father has said nothing about it. He would be miserable, I think, with no one to keep house for him—no one at home when he came back from the City—no one to speak to him on Sundays. At any rate, I shall remain as I am all the rest of the year."

"Have you no aunt, or elder cousin, who could come and stay with you?"

"No one. I have not a near relation in the world. Father was an only child, and mother had no one after her aunt's death, but some very distant cousins, and they, I think, went to Australia or New Zealand. I have often heard father and mother say, that when they married they had no one of kin to either of them to ask to their wedding."

And after a few more kind words, Mrs. Stanbury took her leave, promising to come again, and begging Anne to visit her any time she liked, adding, "And any help that an old woman can give a young one you are welcome to, my dear. I might help you out of a little puzzle now and then, perhaps. Any way, if you want me, ever so little, you know where to find me. And now good-bye, God bless you!"

That conversation did Anne a great deal of good. She felt stronger, more cheerful, and more settled in her mind afterwards. She even thought she would resume some of her studies next week, as she had plenty of leisure at her disposal. The servants did all that wanted doing in the house, and there were not many orders to give now that she was alone all day, and her father at home only in the late evenings and on Sundays. Then she had all her winter clothes ready, or if anything were still wanting she had but to bid the dressmaker send it in.

Mrs. Stanbury was not her only visitor that day. She was sitting in the twilight after her early tea, musing on past days, and watching the shadows on the wall, as the fitful flame in the grate rose and fell, when the door

opened and some one entered unannounced—a tall, graceful figure dressed in mourning.

It was Mrs. Russell, from whom they had not heard for some weeks. She had gone on from Scarborough when she received word that the Wrefords would have to give up their Continental tour; and that was all they knew about her. It seemed strange, Anne thought, that after a year's close intimacy there should be so sudden and complete a silence.

"Oh, Anne, my dear, dear child!" was her greeting, as she folded the girl in her arms, and burst into floods of tears. "Oh, Anne! I didn't know till last night, when I came home. The last letter I had was forwarded to Oban, and I found it there when on the return journey; and that was full of hope. Your papa thought all danger was over, and she only needed tender, careful nursing, and as I knew that you were with her, I was sure she would have that—especially as Mr. Wreford said you had a first-rate nurse, and he stayed at Ivyside very much himself. Oh, Anne! I can't believe it. Tell me all about it, dear."

"I don't think I can,—not just yet, certainly," said Anne, drying the tears which had flowed afresh at sight of Mrs. Russell's, and feeling, likewise, that she could never tell "all about it" to any one; certainly not to a person from whom her mother had always seemed instinctively to shrink. And yet Mrs. Russell appeared to be overwhelmed with grief, and she spoke of Catherine with reverent affection. "Did she mention me at all, Anne?" she asked presently.

"Yes; she spoke of you several times. Once she wondered why we did not hear from you. It was after father wrote that letter addressed to you at Edinburgh, and which, you say, you found at Oban. And in sending messages to different friends she remembered you; it was on the Tuesday—the *last* Tuesday, the last day she was on the sofa; she said, 'Give my love to Mrs. Russell!' She spoke just as if she were going away to a distance for a while. She settled several little things that evening, and she asked father to let Mrs. Rayner have one of her rings as a keepsake, and she had written a short pencil-

note to Mrs. Markham—who was abroad—and I am to give it her with my own hands when she comes back to London."

"How little I thought, when I called here the evening before I went to Scarborough, that I should never see her again! She was tolerably well then—as well as usual; but she always looked delicate. The first time I ever saw her—it was at the *table d'hôte* at Etretat, you know—I thought she looked like a person who might go into a decline."

"She used to be well enough. I recollect hearing her tell Dr. Rayner, when I had the measles three years ago, that she scarcely knew what real illness was. She was not exactly strong, but she was healthy."

"No; she was never strong, I should say, and she could not have had much constitution, or she would have been able to bear up against the fever. And now, to think she is gone! Well! she was fit for heaven, if any one ever was—sweet Catherine! Oh! if I had only known, Anne, I would have hurried home long ago. But it was in this way:—While I was at Scarborough I received a hurried note from your papa, saying only that Mrs. Wreford was ill—too ill to leave home, and that the trip to the German baths must be given up. Perhaps he would take her—his wife—somewhere in the late autumn, if she were strong enough to travel. The letter, which was short, and hastily written, did not give me the idea that there was any danger. I wrote back—I dare say you know—offering to return at once if I could be of any use. I got no answer, and several days afterwards I was far from well. I don't think Scarborough suited me. I was pressed to join some friends who were going to make a tour in Scotland; they had arranged to spend a week or two in Edinburgh, to visit Lochleven and Loch Katrine, and the Pass of Glencoe, and then to explore the Hebrides, to 'do them thoroughly,' they said. And nothing would serve but I must accompany them.

"Well, Anne, I wanted to go, for I had never been north of the Forth in my life; and Colonel Ramsey—my very old friend, and my husband's friend—said he would frank me all through. And yet something—I could not

tell what—made me reluctant, and I hesitated, hoping each day to have news from Ivyside. At last I had to make up my mind, and I told myself that no news was good news, and I went with the party. We were away quite six weeks, and I often thought of my dear friends at Ivyside. At Oban I found that letter ; and though I was shocked to find how very ill your dear mamma had been, I was rejoiced to know that the danger was past, and that it only needed time and care to perfect the recovery of the beloved invalid. And I said to myself, ‘ Ah ! she is almost well now, I hope ’—for the letter was more than a fortnight old—I don’t know if it was not near upon a month ! So that is all about it, dear ; and that explains my silence, does it not ? ”

“ Yes, ” answered Anne, quietly. She was not quite sure in her own mind that “ the silence ” was explained. But it did not matter. She was ready to admit any kind of explanation, and she was, in her heart of hearts, deeply grateful to Mrs. Russell for her prolonged absence. It was her one comfort that she had her mother all to herself in those last days ; that only her father shared with her that last and most sacred watch beside the bed of death. Yes ; she was thankful that Mrs. Russell had been far away ; and though she scolded herself for it, she could not help feeling a certain dissatisfaction at her return.

After a while Mrs. Russell began to question her about her plans. “ When do you return to school, Anne dear ? ”

“ I have not the least idea. Father has said nothing about it. Not yet awhile, certainly.”

“ Ah ! but you are losing time, and time at your age is very valuable.”

“ I do not see that I am losing time, for I have duties here. Mother told me not to let father miss her in the house more than I could help. I am trying, as far as I can, to fill her place.”

“ That is very good and nice of you, and I am sure your dear papa must feel what a good little daughter you are to him. But your interests must be considered ; your education, which is of so much importance, must not be neglected ; besides, it is very bad for you, being here all

day alone with only the servants. What do you do with yourself?"

"Oh! all sorts of things!" returned Anne, a little impatiently. She resented the question.

"I must talk to your papa about it," continued Mrs. Russell, affectionately pressing the girl's shoulder. "Men are so thoughtless, so inconsiderate! For your sweet mother's sake I must interfere on your behalf—your papa will at once perceive ——"

"Pray don't do anything of the sort," interrupted Anne, with a sharpness that came of the sudden pain that stung her at the thought of Mrs. Russell interfering between her father and herself. "I beg you *will not* say anything to father about me; he must not be worried; he can't bear it yet. All in good time he will say how my education is to be continued."

"Very well, my dear; of course you know best. Only you may trust me never to worry your papa. I understand him so well. And, as you say, it is all in good time—a few more weeks' relaxation will do you no harm; but I would strongly advise you to keep up your practising; you should never miss a day—you began music quite too late, you know."

"I mean to practise again; I got out my music this afternoon, and some of my French books, too."

"That's a good girl—a good, sensible little girl! You are your father's own daughter, Anne—so practical; just like him."

Anne made no reply; there was something in the praise she could not relish. She fervently wished Mrs. Russell had stayed away in the Hebrides or anywhere else, so that she had not come back again to live at Hackney. "For now," said she sadly, when she was alone again later in the evening, "she will be having a finger in every pie! She will interfere with me perpetually, and I had rather any one else interfered; and she will come between father and me—I know she will! I do hope he will give her the cold shoulder, now; he knew dear mother never could honestly like her. I am afraid—I am so afraid, that if she comes often she will establish some sort of influence over him. He always did listen to her, he was always

quoting her, till lately. Suppose!—oh, what nonsense! But I would give anything if only she would go to America, or India, or anywhere, thousands of miles away from London."

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN ORNAMENTAL WOMAN.

THAT winter passed away very quietly, and as the weeks and months wore on, Anne began to find herself extremely dull. After all, she was but a child, though the companionship of her mother and the recent sorrow of her great bereavement had forced upon her a sort of premature womanhood, which is one of the evils to which girls who are "only children" are peculiarly exposed. How long those dreary December and January days seemed to her; and how sad was that Christmas Day at Ivyside! Anne and her father dined alone together, and the cook, who stood in wholesome awe of her young mistress as well as of her master, sent them up a dinner of half-a-dozen courses, that might well have served a score of people. The father and daughter made talk rather than conversed while the servants were in the room, but as soon as they were left alone with the dessert upon the table, Robert proposed that they should turn to the fire and crack their nuts in comfort; and there they sat till late in the afternoon, scarcely exchanging a word, and certainly paying little regard to the splendid collection of fruits and sweetmeats that lay behind them.

Anne had almost made up her mind to say something to her father about herself on this occasion; she did not wish to return to school; she felt quite too much of a woman for schoolgirl's rule and discipline; but she saw no reason why she should not take some lessons from

masters, and prosecute her studies in such manner as not to interfere with her home duties. But again and again Anne checked herself when the words were on her lips, for her father looked so sad and seemed so little inclined for conversation of any kind that she could not bring herself to disturb his reverie. "He is thinking of dear mother," she said to herself; "I won't disturb him."

And she was right. Robert felt the loss of his gentle Catherine most deeply; he had not only to deplore her removal from his side, but he was continually filled with a vague remorse for all the neglect of the last few years, and for a thousand small slights and unkindnesses, of which at the time he scarcely took account, but which a too faithful memory now recalled with painful fidelity, showing him a picture of himself that he would fain have refused to contemplate, yet from which he could not turn away, though he looked only to invite fresh self-reproach and to renew a melancholy, vain repentance.

"Shall I bring in the urn, or only two cups of tea or coffee?" asked Jane, coming in with a taper for lighting the gas.

"Just the cups of tea," said Mr. Wreford. "I don't suppose you want anything else, Anne? And don't light the gas, Jane; put a log on the fire, and bring the cups as soon as you can."

And then silence was resumed. Robert stared gloomily into the fire; Anne, in sheer desperation, got out her netting, which she could do very well in the firelight, and wished the day were fairly over—wished, indeed, that Christmas itself were past, or, better still, that it would never come again!

"Is it good to have anniversaries?" she asked herself, as her fingers nimbly formed mesh after mesh. "Is it well to keep birthdays and wedding-days, and feasts and festivals—especially Christmas? It seems to me that the gladdest time of all the year is now, and must ever be, the saddest, for *she* will be always, *always* missing. I think I feel more and more, as time goes on, what I have lost. Oh! how strange it is that the world should go on its way just the same; it can never be the same to me—never again; and yet no one else, except, of course, father, feels

the difference. The shops are just as gay as last year, and the bells ring just as merrily, and the trains go rushing up and down, filled with happy people going to family gatherings, or in some way or other to keep holiday. No one outside mourns that the sweetest woman in all the world is gone out of it. Why should they, indeed? It is nothing to strangers—not much to friends; it is only to us—the blank, the void, the pain, the sense of loss. How strange it all is! How strange *life* is! If it is all so sad and cold and so full of partings, as it seems to me it really is, I can't think how people can cling to it as they do. If one is a Christian, it must be much nicer to die early, and go at once to that blessed life we sang about this morning. How sweetly it sounded:—

“ ‘ Brief life is here our portion,
 Brief sorrow, short-lived care ;
 The life that knows no ending,
 The tearless life, is there :
 Oh, happy retribution,
 Short toil, eternal rest ;
 For mortals and for sinners,
 A mansion with the blest ;

“ ‘ And peace, for war is over,
 And rest, for toil is past,
 And goal of finished striving,
 And anchorage at last ;
 And now we fight the battle ;
 But then shall bear the crown
 Of full and everlasting
 And passionless renown.’ ”

And then Anne, girl-like, was lost in a dream of heaven, all calm and fair and sweet—a dream, some day, dear child, to be no dream—of friends, long-severed, meeting again to part no more; of hand clasping hand after long separation; of eyes looking into other eyes that long ago were shut down upon things of earth; of soul blending with soul, released from the care and toil and burden of the flesh; of the joy of being—all beloved ones—together with the Lord! “ *But*, ” mused the girl, “ I suppose it is rather idle and craven to want the rest before the work is finished. Don't I remember dear mother saying to me, ‘ Slothful servants have no right to think of rest' ? ”

Didn't she tell me how sweet it was to fold the hands to sleep, because the work was *done*? And didn't St. Paul say, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have *kept* the faith'? Ah! and there is another verse of that hymn, too—

“ ‘ And they, who, with their Leader,
Have conquered in the fight,
For ever and for ever
Are clad in robes of white :
Jesus, in mercy bring us
To that bright home of rest ;
Who art, with God the Father,
And Spirit, ever blest.’

Yes; it is a ‘*home of rest*,’ and one cannot very well rest till one is tired; and one should only be tired when one has finished one’s work—the work God gives one to do. I suppose I ought to be content to stay here for many years, doing as well as suffering God’s will, till *He* says, ‘It is enough! dear child, come home!’ He will say it some day, I know that, and so I must not be impatient; I must wait—learn to labour and to wait—to wait God’s time. But oh! just now it is dreary, very dreary! Everything turned dark when *she* died,—and—and—I don’t think father cares very much about me. I don’t feel as if I had much to live for.”

And poor Anne’s tears fell fast on her netting, and she would not wipe her eyes lest she should attract her father’s attention, and so awaken some fresh spasm of pain in his heart. For, as she argued, “After all, it must be so much worse for him than for me; husbands and wives are one, the Bible says, and what must it be to lose a part of oneself? And yet I think I feel sometimes as if some part of me were gone. Oh! even with the hope of reunion in heaven, it is indeed ‘a fearful thing to love what death may touch’!”

And then there was a loud ring at the bell, and Robert started from his reverie, and Anne wondered who it could possibly be coming to see them at such an hour of the evening. Perhaps it might be their pastor, Mr. Kendrick; he did look in sometimes quite promisingly, and to-night he would be sure to think they

needed a little cheering. So she said, poring over the long stitch she had just taken, "I dare say it is Mr. Kendrick."

"Perhaps," replied her father; "though I rather think it is Mrs. Russell. I met her yesterday, and she said she would look in some time after dinner. She knows how sad it must be for us, and she spoke so sweetly of your dear mother! I did not ask her to dine, for I thought you would not like it; but I said, if she had nothing better to do with herself, she might as well—Ah, here she is! How do you do, Mrs. Russell?"

"Quite well, thank you, dear friend. My Highland journey did me a great deal of good. I have been strong and well ever since. How are you? But I need not ask; your solitary Christmas must bring so many sad recollections that—well, we will not speak of it. Some things are best unspoken, are they not? True sympathy needs no words. And how is my little Anne? Ah! netting by firelight!—spoiling your *beaux yeux*, my dear; and poring over books or work by firelight is as bad for them as sitting up late and losing your beauty-sleep. You can see quite well? Ah, yes! now you can, my dear; but you will have to tell another tale, perhaps, in twenty years to come. 'Ah! si la jeunesse savait!' If it did, it would not be so prodigal of its resources. And, then, you spoil your complexion, bending over the fire."

"I have no complexion," replied Anne, colouring with vexation, in spite of herself; "and nothing hurts my skin."

"You will turn out a very presentable *brunette*, if you take just a little care of yourself, I am sure. It is a woman's duty to make the best of herself, is it not, Mr. Wreford? A woman should be useful—that is the first thing, of course; but she ought also—to be a perfect woman—to be ornamental."

"Yes, certainly; a woman should be ornamental," replied Robert; and, without any disloyalty to the memory of his lost Catherine, he thought no woman had a better right to say so than Matilda—or, as she preferred to be called, *Maud*—Russell. Very ornamental she looked at that moment, for, just before, Jane had entered with the tea, and

received orders to bring another cup, and light the gas. Mrs. Russell still wore complimentary mourning for "dear Mrs. Wreford;" that is to say, she wore no colours, and black eminently became her. This evening she had on a rich, long-trained black velvet dress, fitting her perfectly, the bodice cut V-shape in front, revealing artistic puffs and folds of soft white tulle, and a long white neck, round which hung, or rather clung, a dead-gold snake, with diamond eyes and crest, holding pendent in his mouth a large golden heart, in the centre of which shone a diamond of great price. Diamond studs just glinted beneath the foam-like tulle; diamond drops sparkled in the little pinky, shell-shaped ears; diamond rings shone lustrously on several of the delicate, ivory-like fingers; and on one wrist was a bracelet set with diamonds and pearls; on the other a matchless cameo, on a massive plain gold band. The silky, raven hair was simply parted, and wound round and round in simple but luxuriant coils, low down on the back of the shapely head; a single white camellia-bud gleamed snow-like—except where its petals, three parts opened, showed a faint blush of rose upon the edges—on one side of the smooth dark braids. Certainly Mrs. Russell herself was extremely ornamental; and Anne, as she looked at her in the bright light that now filled the room, was fain to acknowledge that she was "beautiful exceedingly." And her beauty was of no ordinary cast, no mere doll-prettiness, either of the blonde or of the brunette type; the perfectly moulded features, the broad, clear brow, the cream tint of the complexion, the ruby lips, so exquisitely cut, the dainty chin, sufficiently rounded to show strength of character, as well as sensitiveness, and the firm, round throat, might all have ravished the soul of an artist or a sculptor. And she sat there in the chair which Robert had handed her, like a queen, stately and regal; and yet, notwithstanding, a gentle, kindly, sympathetic woman of home-life.

"Oh! why can't I be fond of her?" mused Anne, as she gazed admiringly on the lovely breathing picture before her. "But darling mother never really liked her, and, somehow, I always feel that she is acting a part. At

any rate, I wish she would leave *me* alone, and not put fancies into my father's head. What are my eyes and my complexion to her? Oh dear! how cross I am! She can't have any object but a kind one in speaking so; I know I ought not to try my eyes because I am young and my sight is keen; dear mother has warned me against reading by firelight many a time! And of course it is not good to scorch one's face, though with my swarthy gipsy skin what does it matter? Of course, it is natural *she* should think about complexions; I should if I had one half as nice as hers. Heigho! it must be very pleasant to be ornamental, and to feel, without any vanity, that one really is very handsome. I must be content with being useful—and, perhaps, a little, just a little, clever! Ah! if I can but fill darling mother's place to father—if I can but do some good work in the world, I shall not repine; my soul may become beautiful, though my face is plain and my figure awkward."

"What are you thinking about, Anne?" asked Mrs. Russell, suddenly, noting the girl's grave and thoughtful countenance. Anne blushed—blushing rather became her—as she replied, "Of many things, Mrs. Russell; or, rather, I should say, of several."

"Will you not give us the benefit of your thoughts—of some of them, at any rate?"

"I was wondering, for one thing," responded Anne, speaking slowly, "how it felt to be as beautiful and stately as you are, and how it is that everything you wear seems to be a part of yourself."

"You little flatterer!" responded Mrs. Russell, colouring in her turn, so that a vivid carnation for a moment overspread her lovely face, and added to her charms. "But, Anne dearest, it is rather *gauche* to tell me so pointedly and to my face that I am—that is, in your partial estimation—'beautiful!' Compliments, like Christmas presents, should be daintily wrapped up in silver paper!"

"I did not mean to pay you a compliment. And, of course, you *know* you are beautiful," said Anne, bluntly.

"Passable! passable! *chère petite!*" returned the lady, with a little Frenchified movement of her graceful shoulders, and a gesture of the hand peculiar to herself.

"Just another lump of sugar, please, Mr. Wreford. I have what is called a sweet-tooth. I do so enjoy a good, really good, cup of tea. Anne dear, you are the very princess of tea-makers."

"I did not make this; the servants brought it in."

"Oh! I pleased myself with thinking you had done it yourself, you nice little housekeeper! However, the tea is excellent, as everything in your house always is, Mr. Wreford. Ah! I remember this china—how pretty it is! We bought it, you and I, and sweet Catherine—the last time we were at the Crystal Palace altogether—for I certainly must claim the merit of being the first to draw your attention to it."

Anne knew now, or thought she knew, why her mother had always preferred another service all through her illness; she had once been arranging some finger-biscuits, which her mother had fancied, on one of the plates belonging to the new set, and Jane had said to her, "Missis don't like that set, Miss Anne; she told me always to bring her the gold and white." It was Mrs. Russell's choice, not hers, then; and the china, which was certainly in very good taste, had been bought at her suggestion.

"It is so good of you to come in and bring a little brightness to us poor, solitary creatures," said Mr. Wreford presently. "I would have asked you to dine, only we have had no third person yet; and besides, I had not the effrontery to ask you to keep Christmas Day in the house of mourning."

"I wish you had! I have been dining with the Brindley-Lawsons, and I never enjoyed myself less. A very splendid dinner, I suppose, but rather heavy, and the conversation heavier still. I was really delighted to have the excuse that I had promised—I did half promise, you know—to take tea with other friends. And Colonel Lydney was so kind as to say his brougham was at my service. That is one of the ills of poverty, having no carriage; one cannot go about comfortably in London cabs. I had a splendid brougham, of course, in poor Mr. Russell's time, and the best pair of horses in town, entirely at my own disposal. Well, reverses will happen; the only thing is to make the best of them, and accept the inevitable with

all the grace and patience one can muster. Some one wrote a treatise, I fancy, on 'How to grow old gracefully.' I think some other wiseacre might write on the still more difficult theme of 'How to accept poverty gracefully.'

"It must be hard to accept it, having previously and from one's birth been accustomed to riches and prosperity," replied Robert. "I know what poverty is—not such poverty as yours, which includes diamonds and velvet and lace, that a duchess might envy! but real, hard, pinching penury, which made one afraid to spend a sixpence, or even less, needlessly, and compelled one to make everything go just a little farther than was agreeable. You know I am a self-made man."

It was a curious fact that Robert had rather boasted of his humble origin to Mrs. Russell, ever since their intimacy commenced. Generally speaking, as we have shown, he had no mind that his present acquaintances should be reminded of the destitution of his youth, and the *res angusta domi* of his early married life.

Mrs. Russell replied very sweetly, "And what is more admirable than a man self-made, self-cultured, self-educated! You tell me, my friend, that you had no advantages in your boyhood, save such as you yourself struggled for and secured; you say that you never went to a school worthy of the name; that books, up to a certain period, were unattainable treasures; that you fared hardly and worked ceaselessly, and had no time for recreation or study. Well! I am bound to believe it all; but I should never have guessed it, never even have credited it, had the revelation come from other lips than your own. You have the air of a man born and cradled in the purple, you know; you have the tastes and the affinities of a person bred in luxury and refinement. Dear me! I know men who have passed through Oxford or Cambridge—men on whose education fabulous sums have been lavished and wasted, and yet they would not compare at all favourably with you. No! I am not paying compliments; I mean every word I say. If one cannot speak the truth without disguise to one's own friend, one had better keep silence, I am sure. I hold that a self-made man—a man who has struggled through every difficulty, and fought his way to

affluence and position—a man who owes all he has and is to himself alone—is one of the grandest and noblest of God's creatures! Ah! Anne, you ought to be proud of your father."

"How do you know I am not?" asked Anne, coldly. It irked her terribly to hear these praises, and it roused all her antagonism to be recommended by Mrs. Russell to be proud of her own father. She set her lips firmly, lest she should say something better left unsaid. I must confess she looked at that moment particularly unamiable. And her father saw the cloud upon her face, and knew what caused it, and felt thereat annoyed.

But Mrs. Russell resumed: "To be sure you are proud of your father, dear! What a sensitive little heart it is!" And she patted Anne's shoulder affectionately. The long white fingers and the sparkling rings were quite a picture upon the heavy crape. Mrs. Russell had a most beautiful hand, and she knew it; a hand slender, but perfectly proportioned, fingers tapering and rosy-tipped, and palms like velvet, and rose-flushed as the finger-tips; a firm and graceful hand of ivory whiteness that had never known an hour of hard labour, or touched anything that could pollute or mar its brilliant fairness. Robert looked at it, and thought what a lovely, gracious hand it was, and how unlovely and ungracious was his daughter's countenance as she bore the mute caress, evidently longing to wrest herself in open displeasure from the gentle touch.

"Shall we not have some music—sacred music, of course?" said Mrs. Russell, removing at last the unwelcome hand, while Anne impatiently settled the crape-folds which had never been disarranged. "Anne dear, will you play us something?"

"I had rather not," said Anne, struggling to be polite; "but if you wish it very much, I will try."

"I do wish it, indeed. I have not heard you since last Christmas, and I am sure you must be very much improved. Shall I light the piano-candles?"

"Not for me, thank you; I can see quite well," responded Anne, still coldly, and turning over her music portfolio in search of something she thought her father

liked. It was a regular school-girl's piece she at length selected—an easy rendering of "The heavens are telling," with very effective variations. But Anne never played worse; good music and bad temper cannot go together, and she knew that she was playing disgracefully, slurring the notes, taking wrong chords, stumbling over certain bars, and finally breaking down, declaring that she had quite forgotten the piece, and should only blunder on if she tried to finish it.

"It is not sufficiently practised, my dear; that is all," was Mrs. Russell's comment; "you will play it very well if you give a little attention to it. You have a beautiful touch, and your time is excellent. Anne plays very well for the short time she has had lessons, Mr. Wreford, but she cannot afford to lose a day's practice. She may play brilliantly if she will only take necessary pains; and really, in these days, everybody is expected to perform almost professionally. The mediocre strumming of my young days is altogether out of date."

"You have made a mess of it, Anne," said Mr. Wreford, with a little displeasure in his tone. "You must practise more regularly, and you ought to go on taking lessons; as you have begun music you may as well make something creditable of it. I am afraid you want some one to keep you up to your duties."

And Robert sighed heavily. Anne quivered with the pain the words caused her; it was the unkindest cut of all that her father should speak thus, and before Mrs. Russell, too; in fact, that lady's presence gave the sting to the speech. And after she had tried so hard to do all that she could to cheer and console her father, and make his home comfortable! It was too bad; she could hardly repress her tears. How she wished Mrs. Russell had stayed away that evening! how she wished she had remained in the Hebrides or in Fingal's Cave for years and years! And how humbled she felt—not at her failure as regarded the music, though that was vexatious, but at the irritation of temper which Mrs. Russell always managed to provoke.

"Now, please play yourself, Mrs. Russell, and give us some really good music," said Robert presently, when

Anne had returned to the fireside, and resumed her netting. "Will you have the piano-candles lighted?"

"If you please; I like plenty of light. Thanks. What shall I play?"

"Whatever you please. Is the music-stool all right?"

No; it required to be lowered a little; and then the candles burned dimly for a minute. Mrs. Russell spoke truth when she said she liked "plenty of light." Her beauty could bear a blaze of light; no shadows, no half-lights, no "rose-coloured curtains," for her! She knew that she never looked better than in broad sunshine, or in the full glare of the chandeliers. Conveniently placed at last, Mrs. Russell commenced singing "He shall feed His flock" in her richest contralto tones. Afterwards she gave them pieces of Mozart's Twelfth Mass, airs from the "Elijah," and, finally, several of the most beautiful and dreamy *Lieder ohne wörte*. By that time it was getting late, and Robert ordered up the supper-tray, for all the party had dined earlier than usual. Mrs. Russell seemed to enjoy her slice of cold turkey and her glass of champagne amazingly, and she and her host had quite a learned discussion on the respective merits of *Veuve Clicquot* and *Moet's* "Best Quality." Mrs. Russell preferred the former, and won Robert over to her opinion before the repast concluded. Then he could do no less than emulate the example of the gallant Colonel Lydney, and order the brougham round for his visitor's accommodation; to the extreme disgust of the coachman, who did not relish turning out at eleven o'clock on a cold, misty Christmas night, after enjoying himself, in right festal fashion, in the bosom of his family.

Anne went off to bed as soon as she had put away the wine, vexed with herself, ashamed of the temper she had exhibited, and not a little apprehensive of a lecture from her father, who was clearly displeased with her behaviour. Mrs. Russell came to them again on New Year's Eve, and again Anne spent an uncomfortable evening; but, profiting by experience, she kept both her face and her voice under control, and

was rewarded at last by being told that she was "a dear little girl, and worthy of being her father's daughter." Anne felt that the force of flattery "could no farther go."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"WILD HORSES WILL NOT DRAG ME THERE."

IT was autumn again, and Anne had been at home now a whole twelvemonth. But since Easter she had attended a morning-school, and received lessons from several masters. Her father had gradually recovered his spirits, and sometimes received a few friends, though no actual party was given. Anne prosecuted her intimacy with Mrs. Stanbury and her niece Maria, to her great content; for at Clematis Cottage—for so Mrs. Stanbury's pretty little house was called—she often found the wise counsel she sorely needed, and never went there without coming away cheered, and encouraged to overcome difficulties, and especially those which had their source in her own undisciplined temper. She strove with all her might to like Mrs. Russell, but succeeded very poorly; that lady became more than ever a thorn in the flesh to her, for as the spring advanced she saw so much of her, and was required on several occasions to submit to her questions of dress, of study, and even of household arrangement.

"The worst of it is," she said one day to Maria Meredith, "all her plans are good, if not super-excellent. She always knows exactly how things should be; she has a thousand pretty little devices of her own, as regards both the toilet and the table. She is full of resources, whatever be the emergency; and I must say she has got me out of no end of scrapes into which I should have fallen through my thoughtlessness and inexperience. She really

is wonderfully clever, and what father calls 'a woman of faculty!' Only I can't feel grateful to her, as I know I ought to feel; and she is so kind to me in little ways, and helps me with my music and German, better than any of the governesses at our college, and she never will let father scold me! But that is where the shoe pinches! I had rather father were left to scold me at his will. I cannot bear that any one should come between him and me. And I don't see what she has to do with it, Miss Meredith. Why should she pretend to influence father?"

"Why, indeed!" replied Miss Meredith, scarcely knowing how to answer.

Of course, people were not blind, and there were already whispers about Mr. Wreford and the beautiful widow, who had lately interested herself more than ever in the affairs of Ivyside, and grown wonderfully fond of "darling Anne." But there had been no defined report. "Only eight months since poor Mrs. Wreford died, you know! Of course, there is nothing in it *yet*," said the gossips, when they talked their neighbours over. And, happily, no one presumed to give Anne even a remote hint of what *might* be some day—next summer probably; and, not being a girl given to speculations on love and matrimony, she did not disquiet herself as she might have done with forebodings of what might happen; though, every now and then, the thought would dart into her mind that it was not impossible that her father should marry again—in a year or two, say—and that his choice *might* fall on Mrs. Russell. That he had already made his election, that he and Mrs. Maud were actually affianced lovers, never once occurred to her!—but so it was. Robert and Mrs. Russell had somehow drifted into an understanding. No proposal was ever made, and there were no public demonstrations of anything beyond a mutual kindly feeling; but when the summer roses began to fade, and the berries grew crimson on the mountain-ash, the pair had begun to talk about the wedding-day, and they called each other in private "Robert" and "Maudie;" and sometimes, after the fashion of lovers, more endearing names than these: Anne thought afterwards that she must have been wilfully blind, for so many

things passed before her that might have revealed the true state of affairs. But she had read very few novels ; she had never cared for the ordinary school-girl chatter about lovers and engagements and prospective weddings ; she had never watched the progress of any courtship, as might have happened had she elder sisters or cousins, like some of her young friends ; so she failed to recognise the character of the regard which evidently subsisted between her father and the woman whom, of all others, she instinctively disliked. Besides, it is difficult for any girl to realise her own father in his new and too-often unwelcome capacity of lover.

Mrs. Russell had taken up her abode with some friends of hers at Stamford Hill ; they were relatives of her late husband, and their name was Gresley. They were a Mr. and Mrs. Gresley, elderly, fashionable people, with four daughters—two already married, and two still candidates for promotion. Mrs. Russell was a pattern of propriety, and when regular love-making became a part of Robert's programme whenever they met, she deemed it quite time—widow as she was—to place herself “under protection.” No one should ever say that she went courting Robert ; and who shall blame her ? No sooner had her lover taken possession, as it were, than Ivyside became a tabooed place ; to Anne's extreme relief, she construing the lady's absence in the way most satisfactory to herself—her father and Mrs. Russell were becoming less intimate ! Consequently, the remote danger which she had occasionally apprehended no longer existed, and she would be freed from a yoke which was all the more troublesome, because it was so well-lined and so softly padded as to seem to outsiders no yoke at all. Oh, poor deluded Anne Wreford ! As regarded the practical concerns of life, and the common sense of most things, she was a woman before her time. As regarded *les affaires de cœur* she was a veritable child, much more so than her years warranted. Girls in their sixteenth year are usually sharp enough in scenting and finding out all about forthcoming marriages and unannounced engagements. But, all at once, Anne's eyes were opened, and the dreamy, undefined vision of a possible step-mother became a dread reality. It was a

scorching August day, almost as hot as that on which Mr. Jobson had grumbled at taking his mistress and his horses to the West End a year ago. Mrs. Russell and her friend Laura Gresley were taking luncheon at Ivyside, and, for a wonder, in Anne's estimation, at least, Mr. Wreford was at home. Miss Gresley was a giddy young creature of five-and-thirty, and she managed to make herself agreeable to Anne Wreford. Various alterations and improvements were being planned at Ivyside; some of them Anne approved, others she thought unnecessary and whimsical.

Luncheon being over, and Mr. Wreford and Mrs. Russell engaged in conversation about the redecoration of the drawing-room, Laura, with an engaging affectation of girlishness, threw her arms round Anne's waist, and whispered, "Let you and I slip away, *chère Annette*, and leave these infatuated people to their own devices. Let us go and sit in that shady summer-house under the great chestnuts."

Anne was quite ready to comply, for the dining-room was warm and close, though the windows were wide open to the lawn, and she was tired of hearing the changes rung upon yellow or rose damask, green and gold, or blue and silver. "What a fuss it all is!" she said, a little pettishly, when she and her companion found themselves at a safe distance from the house. "Any colour that is pretty will do; though, for my part, I would rather the room were left as it is. It is just as it was when dear mother sat last in it. And that white and gold paper is as clean as when it was first hung. I can't imagine what makes father so hot upon papering and painting and new furniture, all of a sudden."

"*Can't you?*" said Laura, significantly. "Oh, you innocent, unsophisticated *Annette*!"

"Don't call me *Annette*, please; my name is *Anne*—plain *Anne*! and I never was called anything else. And why do you call me innocent and unsophisticated? Your tone seems to imply that you mean rather credulous and foolish!"

"I am not sure that you are very wise, if, indeed, you really do *not* know what is going on under your own eyes!"

Only—I can't believe it—you must be playing *l'ingénue, chère petite!* Surely, surely—to speak expressively, though inelegantly—you smell a rat?"

"I smell a rat!" returned Anne, quite confounded. "Well, I cannot say I do. Please explain yourself."

"Is it possible you don't see why Maud sticks out for amber satin in the drawing-room?"

"How should I? I hate yellows, unless it be the most delicate lemon tints; and what do we want with a rose and silver boudoir?"

"Ah, Anne, Anne! you are playing *l'ingénue* with a vengeance! Amber suits Maud's complexion better than any other colour, though rose tints are very becoming; for you can't call her a downright brunette. That very pale clear olive is better designated as cream-colour, I think."

"But!" said Anne, bewildered, yet feeling sick at heart, and almost physically sick as well—"but why should our drawing-room be made to suit her complexion any more than Mrs. Gresley's, or Mrs. Dawson's, or —?"

"You will be the death of me, Anne Wreford—I can't help laughing at you. But if you really and truly are so ignorant of impending events, I am not at all sure that I am the proper person to enlighten you."

"You don't mean that *my father* is going to marry *Mrs. Russell*?"

"I do mean it, though."

"When?" And Anne put her hand to her side, as though a sudden, sharp pain had seized her, and leaned against the trunk of a tree. She had become so ghastly pale, that Miss Gresley was terrified, and wished from her inmost heart she had not there and then been tempted to make the disclosure. "When?" again Anne questioned, in a low and hollow voice, with her hand over her eyes, like one who waits in dread a cruel stab or blow.

"In about six weeks, I believe. The end of September will suit your papa for leaving home, and Maud likes that time as well as any other; only there is so much to be done. But the dressmakers are hard at work, of course, and the lawyers have all their instructions. Maud will not be married without proper settlements this time;

she has had quite enough of being left in the lurch. It was a shame of poor old cousin Jacob to die before he made his will."

But Anne spoke no word. There she stood, as if turned into stone, leaning still against the tree, her face covered with her hands, as if the light were hateful.

"Come now," said Miss Gresley, "you mustn't take it in this way! I never thought you would be so upset. Dear me! it is rather silly of you, is it not? Most men marry a second time if they get the chance, and why not Mr. Wreford? Maud says he is only in his forty-eighth year; that's quite young for a man, you know, and he is very handsome, and has plenty of money, and you are his only child. Bless me! why should he go mourning all his days? Why should he not be happy again, with a young and charming wife? Not that Maud is as young as she pretends to be! She gives out that she is under thirty; now I know for a fact that she will never again see her three-and-thirtieth birthday! But what of that? She is still fourteen or fifteen years your papa's junior, and a most suitable match in every way. Anne, why don't you speak?"

At last Anne did uncover her face, and dropped into her seat with a deep sigh. She was not crying, but Laura could hardly believe that she was the same girl who had helped her to cutlets less than half an hour ago, nor yet the same who had come with her from the house, wondering why the drawing-room and other rooms should be so hastily rehabilitated. Miss Gresley was not by any means a tender-hearted girl, yet she felt extremely sorry for Anne, and thought her father might himself have taken the trouble to inform his daughter of the change so speedily awaiting her.

"You are quite sure about it?" Anne said, after a long silence. "It is *really* settled?"

"As settled as Magna Charta and the Reform Bill. Why, child, the wedding-dress is ordered—white satin—the richest satin I ever saw, and the loveliest little bonnet and Brussels lace veil. What a pity it is a widow may not be married in a veil and wreath! and she mustn't wear orange-blossoms, you know."

"Mustn't she? She might, if she chose, I fancy."

"Of course, there is no law against it, but a woman in society obeys *les convenances* on principle. Maud would not for worlds do anything improper; and it would be glaringly improper if she went to church in a maiden bride's attire. There's another thing, too, that's vexatious—widows don't have bridesmaids."

"Don't they?" said Anne, in a tone of relief. It had just flashed upon her that bridesmaids would probably be required, and that she would be commanded to officiate in that capacity.

"No," returned Laura; "but they have attendants—brideswomen, I suppose you may call them. Maggie and myself are to be brideswomen, also Henrietta Thompson and Mrs. John Gresley. It's pretty much the same thing, only one cannot be dressed so gaily. Two of us—we two—are to be in silver-grey and palest blue, and the other two in mauve and cream. Then your dress has to be arranged; it was talked about last night. Your papa leaves it entirely in Mrs. Russell's hands—no one has such taste, as he well knows; but Maud said she did not like to order it till she had spoken to you about it. What will you wear, dear? I advise a pretty full pink, not *too* deep, of course, nor yet too pale. Shouldn't you prefer that to primrose or blue?"

"No, I should not."

"Ah! but you ought to have some choice. Maud is quite anxious, I assure you, that you should present a good appearance on the wedding-day. Mamma proposed white muslin—embroidered, of course, and elegantly trimmed with good lace. But Maud said it would not look important enough. What do you think?"

"I think nothing, and shall think nothing about it."

"It would serve you right if Maudie dressed you up to look like Glumdalclitch, or some horror of notoriety. You deserve to go to church in serge, or grogram—whatever that may be—with big sunflowers in your bonnet, and a scarlet dahlia in your hand."

"I go to church on such an occasion! How could you suppose I should go? Wild horses will not drag me there."

"I dare say not; but tame ones will—wedding-greys, of course, with white favours at their ears, and a wedding-chaise behind them."

"I tell you nothing shall induce me to take any part in so shameful a ceremony! I will not go to the church; I will not show myself during the wedding festivities; I will not put off my mourning. It is infamous! wicked! cruel! and my darling was with us this day twelve-months! Is the wedding-day fixed for the day after that which brings round the anniversary of her funeral? A twelvemonth and a day is the *fixed* term of decent or indecent widowhood, I believe."

"Take care, Anne; you are sitting in judgment on your own father, remember. And you will be very foolish if you provoke Maud's enmity so needlessly; and she knows how to hate, I promise you. Mrs. Wreford will not be quite as bland and sugary as Mrs. Russell; you had better take care."

"Don't call her *that*, for pity's sake."

"She will be '*that*!' I have no doubt her cards are ordered—'Mrs. Robert Wreford, Ivyside.' I think, if I were she, I would retain my present name as well. 'Mrs. Robert Russell Wreford' sounds very well—quite a grandiose roll about it."

"*Quite!*" said Anne, with bitter sarcasm. "Only I should always think of the school exercise on R's, as, 'round the rugged, rugged rocks.' Shall we go back to the house?"

"You are not fit to go back; you look as if you had seen a ghost since luncheon—a legion of them, indeed."

"I shall not meet *them*; I am going to my own room—I can slip up the back stairs. Will you be so kind as to make my excuses."

"Shall I tell them you know?"

"I shall be obliged to you if you will."

"I need not say I shall be prudent, and not repeat a word of what you have been saying."

"On the contrary, you will be so good as to repeat it all. They will certainly ask you how I took such a delightful piece of news, and you must tell the truth."

"Not I! I never speak the truth when it is ugly. I

shall say you were a little upset at first, but that you are calmer now, and — ”

“ As you will. I am going ; ” and without more ado Anne turned into a side walk, in time to escape being seen by the betrothed pair, who were just issuing from the dining-room window. She entered the house unperceived, and gained her bedroom in safety. Then she locked the door, fiercely, and drew the bolt as well, and lowered the blinds, for she could not bear to see the sunshine and the waving trees and smiling flowers without. A minute afterwards she was lying on her bed, sobbing as if her heart were broken. “ Oh, mother, mother ! ” she cried, piteously, “ why did I not go with you ? No one really loved you but me, and no one loved me but yourself. Oh, why did not God take us both together ? It is cruel, cruel, to put this woman in your place ; this woman, who troubled you, I know. And I can do nothing to prevent it. She will have your dear name, and sit in your place, and perhaps I shall see father pet her, and make much of her. Oh, how shall I ever bear it ? But I will never acknowledge her — no, never ! I will never call her ‘ mother ’ ; and as for going to the wedding — how shocking it sounds ! my own father’s wedding ! — I would as soon, and sooner, mount the scaffold ! Oh, mother ! mother darling, it is too hard ; I cannot bear it ! ”

Hours sped on, and Anne still lay there making her passionate, vain lament, till at last she wept herself to sleep. It was dark when she awoke, and she felt faint and cold, warm as was the evening. Some one was knocking at her door, and she called out to ask who was there. It was Jane, saying she was afraid that she was ill, and would she not come down, or would she have a cup of tea at once ? Her mistress replied that she had a bad headache, and was altogether unwell ; she would rather not be disturbed ; she wanted nothing, only to be left alone ; in the morning she would be better. But Jane continued, “ Master said I was to tell you, ma’am, that he wished to see you particular.”

“ Tell my father my head is too bad ; I cannot talk to-night.”

Jane went down with the message, but quickly returned, begging that the door might be opened. "What is it?" asked Anne, in an exhausted tone. "I told you I could take nothing; I am going to bed, Jane."

"Oh, Miss Anne, I think you had better go down, if it is only for a minute; your pa did seem so angry when I told him what you said. And he made answer—'Go back to Miss Wreford and tell her that I am not inclined to submit to any folly; I command her to come down into the dining-room instantly; if she loiters, I shall go to her. I wish to speak with her on important business.' Them's his very words, Miss Anne, dear, and oh! I haven't seen him look so stern-like since before the precious missus died! I'd go down if I was you. I would, indeed, Miss Anne. Ah! we servants have seen what was coming this long while!"

Anne hesitated a moment, and then said, "Go down, Jane, and tell your master that I am coming in a few minutes." She lighted the gas, and looked at herself in the glass. Must she go down with that swollen face, which scarcely looked like hers, and in that rumpled dress, which there was no time to change? "It does not matter," she said to herself, as she hastily smoothed her hair, after plunging her head into cold water. "There!" she resumed, "that seems to revive me a little; I should think drunken people, after a debauch, feel pretty much as I do now—sick and weak and stupid; but oh! not half so miserable. What a wretch I look!"

Then, shaking out her creased and crumpled skirts, she went totteringly downstairs. Her father was in the dining-room, reading an evening paper as coolly as if nothing at all was the matter. He did not hear her enter, and was only aware of her presence when she was close to him. Then he turned and saw her, and started as if a spectre had met his view. "In Heaven's name, what have you done to yourself?" he cried, excitedly, for the moment really shocked at poor Anne's ghastly countenance and wholly forlorn aspect.

"I have a throbbing headache——" she was beginning, when he stopped her.

"Yes, of course you have! women have always a

headache when they want to beat a retreat. But that won't do, Anne; I must know what it all means! Laura Gresley told me something, but I couldn't believe it—it was too monstrous. She must have exaggerated, or been mistaken; *my* daughter could never behave so shamefully. Why don't you speak?"

"What can I say?"

"Was what Laura told us the truth?"

"I do not know what Laura said—"

"Anne! be warned! don't infuriate me; I may forget myself. I never struck you in your life; but you may provoke me beyond endurance."

"Laura could scarcely exaggerate what I said, and she could not well mistake. I spoke plainly."

"Plainly enough. She declares that you raved at the idea of my approaching marriage, and vowed wild horses should not drag you to the church on our wedding-day."

"I did say so, and I say it again. Father, I can't see my mother's husband married to another woman!"

"Your mother's husband, child! What nonsense! You must be wild. Death dissolves any marriage; a widower is no longer a husband; he is as free to take a wife as in the days of his youth."

"I know that. But oh, father! I never thought you would so soon forget my mother. I thought you might marry again *some day*, for men are not faithful as women are; but *so soon!*—so very soon, before the flowers we planted on her grave are well rooted. Father, you can't expect me to like it."

"Well, perhaps not, at first," said Robert, a little softened; "but you are a girl of sense, and will learn to accommodate yourself to circumstances. You must feel that you are too young to keep my house—far too young to preside at my table. It will be for your advantage, my dear; indeed, it is very much on your account that I am anxious to lose no time in securing to you so valuable a friend and counsellor. Mrs. Russell loves you very dearly, Anne; it was quite touching to hear her speak of you and plead for you when I showed my just displeasure at Laura's statement. You will reap nothing but benefit from this marriage; you ought to rejoice that I have won

so lovely and admirable a creature—a woman who would adorn a diadem, a woman whom a prince might well be proud to marry! I am proud to know she is mine; and, Anne, I love *her* more than words can tell! I did not guess it was in me to love any woman as I love her. Therefore, for my sake, treat her as a daughter should, and give her that welcome she has a right to expect from you. Don't answer me to-night; go to bed and sleep your headache away. To-morrow we will talk over various matters that must be settled. Good-night, my dear; be a good girl. Remember! Maud Russell and I are henceforth *one*, and you cannot pain and insult her without doubly paining and insulting me. Good-night."

He would have kissed her, but Anne drew back. She could not make up her mind to touch the lips that had been so lately pressed to Maud Russell's.

CHAPTER XXIX.

GOOD ADVICE.

To Anne's infinite relief, her father on the morrow made no reference to last night's stormy interview; but at breakfast-time it was evident that he was displeased; he scarcely spoke except to find fault with the several dishes upon the table; and when the meal was over, and he was about to start for his usual morning train, he simply said, "I shall not dine at home to-day; you had better not sit up; I shall probably be very late. The workmen are coming into the house immediately; you must see that the drawing-room is cleared ready for them to make a beginning. Also, I wish you to write out a list of the house-linen, and post it to Mrs. Russell as soon as possible."

"Very well, father." And Robert went his way, and

saw no more of his daughter till next morning, though she caught a glimpse of him over the banisters, when at length he returned, a full hour after midnight. Of course he had been at Stamford Hill, courting his beautiful betrothed ! "At his age, too ! I wonder he is not altogether ashamed of himself," she thought, as she slipped back to her own room and softly shut the door. At fifteen, forty-seven seems almost venerable ; at fifteen, too, one is apt to judge severely, and to entertain opinions of the most uncompromising nature ; lastly, at fifteen, one fancies that feelings can never change ; that life, once blighted, never flourishes again ; that a root of bitterness, once planted, can never throw out shoots and buds of promise in the day to come. Anne Wreford firmly believed that she would never more be happy. What but misery could come of this rash and most unsuitable marriage !

A week passed away, and Mr. Wreford did not revert to the subject which doubtless occupied his own mind as well as his daughter's. He spoke sometimes, when it was necessary, about the changes that were in course of progress, and about fresh alterations that were continually planned ; but he treated everything as a matter of course, and on more than one occasion referred to the marriage as to an ordinary occurrence. Once the servants came to their young mistress for special orders respecting the rooms that were being made ready for the bride ; there was some slight misunderstanding, and both workmen and domestics were at a standstill. Anne could not enlighten them ; she had no orders to give ; she knew no more than they what really was required ; and she felt humiliated in avowing her ignorance.

That night, when Mr. Wreford came home, and went as usual to the scene of the alterations, and found that the rooms were no forwarder than when he had seen them last, he asked Anne, in a tone of displeasure, why this was so ; and when he was told somewhat pointedly that the work had been stopped for want of a simple *yes* or *no*, which she had not been able to pronounce, he replied, "Of course, in one sense you are not to blame, and yet you are in fault ! I have not consulted you on any point,

neither have I discussed any plan with you, and the reason why I have not done so is self-evident. My first impulse, when you behaved so ill, the day that Mrs. Russell and Laura Gresley lunched here, was to have it out with you there and then, and settle all disputes and controversies at once and for ever. A little reflection convinced me that you did not deserve to be treated as a reasonable person. You behaved like a silly child, showing me how much I had overrated your sense, and proving beyond question how wisely I was acting in giving you a step-mother, who would advise you for your good, and keep you under requisite control. Therefore, as a child I treat you now, and shall continue so to do till you conduct yourself in more womanly fashion. One would think it became a parent to ask consent of his children before he contracted a second marriage!"

"Oh no, no, indeed! But, father, it is of no use to talk, I shall only offend you more deeply, for nothing can ever make me like—honestly like—Mrs. Russell. I cannot—*cannot* trust her."

"No one asks you to trust her. Your opinion of my future wife is quite gratuitous. I am fully satisfied myself, and that is all that concerns her or me."

"Do you really wish me to be present when—on that day, you know?"

"I leave it entirely to your own decision. Please yourself; it can make very little difference to either of us what a foolish child thinks, or says, or does. Be of the wedding-party if you choose; stay away if you choose. I really do not care in the least about it. A cross-grained, ill-tempered girl would scarcely be a pleasing spectacle on such an occasion; nor am I sure that after all your unamiable speeches you will be invited."

Anne went away quite confounded. To be ignored, to be treated as a nobody, was a form of punishment she had never anticipated. This was worse than any violent anger, far worse than the persecution for which she had striven to prepare herself. She began to feel how powerless she was to exercise any sort of influence over her father, and that henceforth she must be a cipher in his house. To be left alone, to be laughed at by the happy

lovers, to be pitied, perhaps, by the bride-elect—it was more than she could bear. And yet, bear it she must, for how could she remedy the evil? To whom could she make appeal? She scarcely dared go out of doors, lest she should meet some one who would either congratulate or condole with her; and in the house she either sat still, lost in her utter misery and sense of friendlessness, or else roamed about from room to room when the workmen were not in her way. She had expected to be extremely busy, superintending and carrying out many little domestic alterations and improvements; and when the first burst of mingled passion and anguish was over, she had resolved within herself to do all that was required of her to the best of her ability, coldly and gravely, in silent protest against the whole affair; but still to do it without complaint and without criticism—a mute reproach to her deluded, heartless parent whenever he should see her.

But it so happened that he scarcely ever saw her, and when they did meet he gave her none of the charges for which she had prepared herself. She had pictured herself to herself fitting up the bride's *boudoir*—such utter nonsense as it was!—performing her task with something of the feelings of a martyr sewing her own shroud. And she was not even asked to stir a finger! People came and went whose business she did not know; she encountered strange men and women on landings and in the hall; she stumbled over rolls of “stuffs” from the upholsterer's; things came in “on approbation,” which she was neither asked to approve nor to condemn; she was too unhappy to read or to practise her music, and as it was everywhere the long vacation, she had no lessons for her masters to prepare. In after years Anne looked back to those days as the most miserable of her life.

One morning she was walking in the garden—it was just a fortnight since she had learned the truth from Laura Gresley—when Jane came to say that Mrs. Stanbury had called and asked to see her. Mrs. Stanbury was about the only person from whom, just then, she did not shrink—except, indeed, Mrs. Markham and Philip Rutland, and neither of them, as far as she knew, had learned the news; for the last she heard of them Mrs.

Markham was at the seaside, and Philip was superintending some important business in Vienna.

"Where is Mrs. Stanbury?" she asked.

"Well, Miss Anne, I just put her in master's study; there really was nowhere else to ask her! The dining-room carpet is being took up this very minute, and the breakfast-room is crammed full of the new furniture, so that one can't get into it. As for the drawing-room, it's nothing but wet paint and whitewash, and not a chair to sit upon. I'd half a mind to bring her straight out here."

"I will go and ask her if she would mind sitting in the summer-house. Take some biscuits there, and some wine, if you can find any."

"I shall want the keys, ma'am."

"There they are; but I am afraid the sideboard is empty, and—and—I think I have not the wine-cellar key. Indeed, I *know* I have not!" continued Anne, ashamed of her small prevarication. Her father had asked for the key of the wine-cellar more than a week before, in order, as she conjectured, to take stock of its contents, and he had not returned it. As she always drank water herself, this was no personal inconvenience; but it vexed her to be unable to offer the usual hospitality to a visitor. She hurried into the house and into the study, the only room, as Jane said, in which there was a respectable chair to sit upon.

Mrs. Stanbury was startled when she saw her young friend; the last fortnight had played sad havoc with the girl's looks; she was both thinner and sallower than usual, and that is saying a great deal; for Anne, like other fast-growing youthful creatures, was painfully lean and angular, and as to her complexion, she had long ago, as she told Nellie Rutland, given up thinking at all about it. But now there was a sickly pallor in her countenance, her eyes were heavy and the eyelids rather red, for she had found relief in tears lately, and the fountains, once unsealed, had flowed in copious streams when there was absolute freedom from all chances of intrusion. Mrs. Stanbury had only just learned the truth of the report, which had been current long before it was a truth, in the circle to which she and the Wrefords alike

belonged. She had waited to be quite sure before she paid this visit to her favourite.

"You are all in confusion here, my dear!" said the old lady, when the first salutations were over. "I see you have the workmen in the house, and, what is more, I hear the spattering of brushes, and I smell paint."

"Yes," said Anne, "it is extremely disagreeable. Paint always gives me the headache. Would you dislike to come into the garden, Mrs. Stanbury? We can sit in the summer-house, out of the sun; it is quite comfortable there, and I think you will not find it too airy this warm morning."

"I shall like it very much, my dear, for the house seems full of the essence of paint, and I want to have a little chat with you."

"And I with you, Mrs. Stanbury; it was in my mind half an hour ago to put on my hat and pay you an informal visit."

"It is quite a relief to be in the open air," said Mrs. Stanbury, as they were crossing the lawn. "Anne, my dear, I should recommend you to live in the garden while the hot weather lasts, and be sure to sleep with your window open at the top."

"I have done so for the last week. I never knew paint smelt so horribly, and I really think it gets worse rather than better."

"I should be afraid it might not be gone when the bride comes home."

"Oh, then, you know, Mrs. Stanbury?"

"Yes, my dear; I suppose I may say I have known it for some weeks; but, as the report came from mere rumour, I did not feel justified in opening my mouth on the subject. I did not know *for certain* that it was to be till a few days ago, and then your Jane met our Phœbe, and of course the lasses must have their little gossip; and so I learned that the wedding was to be next month."

"Oh, Mrs. Stanbury!"

"Yes, my dear."

"How shall I bear it? If it had been any other woman, or if it had been two or three years hence, I

might have brought myself to take it calmly. As it is, it is dreadful—most dreadful! Oh, how shall I ever bear it?"

And Anne dropped on to the footstool at Mrs. Stanbury's feet, and, with her head on her friend's lap, wept without control. For some minutes Mrs. Stanbury did not try to check her, but after awhile she put back the dark waves of hair from the hot, tear-stained face, and said, "My dear, my dear! this will never do; it is not wise, and it is not *right*. Try to compose yourself, and then let us look this painful event full in the face, and talk it over, if you do not object."

"I do not object to talk it over with you; but I could not speak of it to any other person. That is why I have not been out lately. That is why I did not go to chapel last Sunday. I hoped people would think I had run away from the topsy-turvy house. I felt I should go wild if Mrs. Willis began to ask questions and make her comments."

"My dear Anne, I am going to scold you a little. I am very sorry for you; but I think you are behaving rather unreasonably, and perhaps sowing the seeds of much future misery for yourself. In the first place, what is your grand objection?"

"That another woman should bear rule here, as my father's wife, and take my mother's place, of course. That would have been my feeling, whoever it might have been, or whenever it might have come to pass; but that, of all the women in the world, it should be this very one, whom I as nearly hate as I dare hate any one, and whom my mother always mistrusted and avoided as far as was in her power! That it should be Mrs. Russell is the cruel sting of it."

"What have you against her, Anne?"

"Everything!" replied the girl, vehemently. "She is not true; she is hollow-hearted; she cares no more for father than Miss Meredith does, only she wants to make what people call 'a good match'—such a hateful term!—and so she will marry him. And more than that, she always *meant* to marry him, ever since they first met at Etretat, and I think—I feel sure—that poor mother knew it."

"Anne, my dear, you must not talk so; you scarcely know the interpretation that might be put upon your words."

"I would not say it to any one else, not even to Miss Meredith; but I mean no harm—no real harm! Nothing that society could find fault with. I know what you mean—don't look so grave, dear Mrs. Stanbury; but somehow I have learned a great deal about the wickedness that is in the world during the last few months. I have grown into a woman, and I can never be a mere girl again, though father does treat me as if I were a naughty child."

"And I am not sure, dear, that you are not a naughty child."

"Perhaps I am! I am naughty—I am afraid *wicked*, sometimes; but it is not the naughtiness of a child. What I meant is just this—Mrs. Russell soon found out that father admired her. Everybody—that is, *all* the gentlemen, young and old, married and single—admired her, though the ladies, as a rule, did not. And she very soon saw what I would not see, but what many others saw—that my darling mother was not long for this world. And then Mrs. Russell resolved to be the second Mrs. Wreford when the time came; and she made friends, and kept friends, with that resolve in view. And she managed it all very cleverly, so as to be away—this time twelve months, you know—and not to make her appearance again among us till father's first grief was quieted down. It did come into my head then, when first I saw them together, and even before then, I believe, that she *might* some day become something to me; but I put the notion away as fast as I could. I tried not to think of such a thing, feeling that it wronged my father, who did seem inconsolable for some time after *she* died. I can see now how it came about; I don't blame him so much. It seems to me that a man is never too old to be dazzled by a woman's grace and beauty, or to be caught by a woman's snares. And *caught* he was, and is, Mrs. Stanbury; and nothing will ever convince me to the contrary."

"Let us suppose that to be true; and just take note, Anne, that your father is by no means '*old*.' You speak

as if he were, at the least, a sexagenarian! But, caught or not, you cannot alter it; and I would strongly advise you not to commence your relations with your step-mother with any prejudice of the kind. She *may* love your father, after all; let us hope that she does."

"I am quite sure she does not love him; she never will. She loves herself too well to care very much for any other person. I could forgive her anything if she had only left him alone. But father will find the difference between her and mother—*some day!* His eyes will be opened when it is too late."

"Be sure that you do nothing to open them, Anne. I don't like Mrs. Russell, I confess—she is quite too much a woman of the world for my liking; but she has her good points, I am well convinced. Unless you are perversely antagonistic, I do not think she will be unkind to you. Much, I am sure, my dear, lies in your own hands."

"But you would not have me pretend to like her? You would not have me receive her with open arms, as if I were glad to have her here?"

"Certainly not. To pretend a sentiment is always unjustifiable, and generally leads to awkward issues. But do not begin with a settled aversion; remember that you owe to her a certain duty—she will be your father's wife, and as such she will have a right to be treated by you with all respect and kindness. Nor is that all. You are a Christian girl, and Christianity, as you well know, is worth nothing if it does not influence all your actions. The religion that expends itself in frames and feelings, that sings hymns, and prays often, and reads the Bible, is, after all, a vain religion, unless the life itself, even in smallest trifles, is controlled by the truths which the heart accepts. My love, this is a sore trial for you. With every palliation, it *must* be a trial to you—so soon to see her place filled! Have you told God all about it?"

"God knows it all, and—*permits it!*"

"God does know it all, dear. But did you never carry troubles to your mother that were no news to her? You will find it a relief presently that you have spoken so freely to me; but far greater will be the consolation, infinitely

fuller the sense of comfort, when you have spoken to God, and put the whole matter into His hands. It is *His* will that you should have this trial. Oh, my child, take it as such ; take up the cross which *He* lays upon you, and *He* will help you to bear it. All burdens borne cheerfully, and because *He* imposes them, lose half their weight. Just accept the situation, Anne ; say to yourself, 'God is sending me a step-mother whom I do not like. *He* knows why she is sent ; I don't. I will try, depending upon the help that *He* will surely grant me, to receive this new relation in the spirit of kindness, and to make the best of the position to which I am called.'

"But I feel so certain it will all turn out badly for father. The more he loves Mrs. Russell, the deeper will be his disappointment when he knows her as she really is."

"With that, my dear, you have nothing at all to do. That is your father's own affair—his very own, and most private affair. No one can judge for him ; least of all his young daughter, who knows no more what love is—the love that leads to marriage, that is—than a blind man from birth knows of light and colour. You will know some day, Anne, and then you will judge your father less severely, and his wife, too, perhaps. In the meantime, submit yourself to your earthly parent, for till you do so, you cannot really submit yourself to God."

"I have been afraid I was wrong ; indeed, I knew I was wrong, and yet I felt as if I could not help it. I never felt so angry, so rebellious in my life ; I never felt before such downright enmity towards any person, such littleness of spirit. I knew it, and that, of course, helped my unhappiness ; but then I persuaded myself that it was not I who was to blame—that I did well to be angry."

"Ah, my dear, there are very few occasions when we are really justified in being angry ; the less anger we cherish the better. Of course, one must be angry sometimes ; there are occasions, I suppose, when anger becomes a duty ; but we must carefully guard ourselves against being angry with those who are hurting us and doing us wrong, according to our own estimation of things. And even though we may be angry, and sin not, we are expressly

bidden not to cherish the angry spirit. There is something very touching and beautiful in the apostolic injunction, 'Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.' Anne, my dear, don't go to bed to-night in a wrathful spirit. Think of the lines in the good old Evening Hymn :—

“ ‘ That with the world, myself, and Thee,
I, ere I sleep, at peace may be.’ ”

“ I will try ; I feel I have been very naughty. But you don't know, Mrs. Stanbury—nobody can know how hard it is.”

“ No, my dear ; of course I don't know. It is as true now as it was in the days of Solomon, that ‘the heart knoweth its own bitterness’ ; and there's a homely saying that ‘none but the wearer knows where the shoe pinches.’ No one but yourself can know how keenly this trouble touches you, nor how heavily the prospect of the future weighs upon your mind. But God knows ! God knows all about it.

“ ‘ And what looks dark in the distance
May brighten as it grows near ;
It may be the bitter future
Is less bitter than I think,
The Lord may sweeten the waters
Before I come to drink ;
Or if Marah must be Marah,
He will stand Himself by the brink.’ ”

Won't you take comfort, Anne—the only comfort there is for you ? ”

“ I'll try. You have done me good, as you always do when I want good done to me. Tell me, ought I, do you think, to say anything to father, to humble myself, I mean ? ”

“ I do not know, dear, how much cause you have to humble yourself. If you have only rebelled silently, if you have said nothing unseemly to him, nor shown him a sullen, foward countenance, I should say it would be best to make no reference to the past ; only amend your ways, meet him cheerfully, and give him your sympathy as far as you can, without assuming feelings that do not exist.”

“ As to my sympathy, I don't think he wants it : he never asks my opinion now, not even about household

matters. The servants are quite as much in his confidence, if not rather more, than I am."

" May that not be your own doing ? "

" Well ! I dare say it is. I told him how greatly I disliked and mistrusted Mrs. Russell. And I told him wild horses should not drag me to the wedding !—and—and I really think I could not have shown much more indignation had mother still lived."

" No wonder, then, that he is angry and estranged from you. My dear, if I may advise you, I should say lose no time in making it all straight with your father. As to the way of doing it you are the best judge. And try to accept your step-mother as you would any other inevitable affliction ; don't resist her lawful authority, or resent her presence here. Make the very best of it, and don't cultivate your prejudices. Afflictions, you know, often turn out to be blessings in disguise."

" Mrs. Russell will never turn out to be a blessing—I am almost sure of that ; I only hope she may not prove a curse."

" At any rate, don't *expect* her to be that. When we anticipate evil, it is almost sure to arrive in one shape or another. I must leave you, my dear—I promised Maria not to stay too long ; she is going to Canonbury this afternoon to see her sister."

And Mrs. Stanbury took her departure, leaving Anne to meditate over what had been said to her. As Mrs. Stanbury and her niece sat over their early dinner, the latter asked how poor Anne was taking the impending alliance. When she had been told, she remarked that Anne's repulsion towards the match was not to be wondered at. Mr. Wreford was certainly proceeding in indecent haste, and it was greatly to be questioned whether he was acting prudently in thus taking to his bosom a woman of whose antecedents no one knew anything.

" All we know of her is from her own lips, assuredly," replied Mrs. Stanbury. " She was certainly married to a rich old man of the name of Russell, for his relations acknowledge her. But who she herself really is, I believe no one knows, unless it is Mr. Wreford himself. Let us hope that she has been candid with him, at least !

After all, I don't see why *we* should sit in judgment on her."

" We should not—I am sure I should not—but for Anne. I am so fond of Anne Wreford. I do believe, aunt, the mother-instinct is in every woman's breast, whether she marries or not. I feel often as if I should like to mother that poor child. I may say so now that Mr. Wreford is as good as married again."

" Of course you may—to *me*! Not that you and Mr. Wreford would ever have suited. You are far too good for him in yourself, and not nearly good enough as far as mere externals go."

" Aunt, I never thought of such a thing. No, indeed! I am just a plain old maid, with only enough to live upon economically, and Mrs. Russell is beautiful and brilliant, and comparatively young ; though I doubt if she is much richer than I, when you come to the point. And I think—I may say it to you, aunt, because you won't think it a case of sour grapes—I would rather be the most contemned spinster that ever lived, than Robert Wreford's wedded wife. I should like Anne for my daughter ; but I should like her without her father. Mrs. Russell is welcome, and more than welcome, to *him* ; but, as far as I am concerned, she is not welcome to his daughter."

CHAPTER XXX.

" HASTE TO THE WEDDING!"

ANNE was not to be without good advisers any longer. She had scarcely digested Mrs. Stanbury's wise counsel, when Philip Rutland was announced, and again the summer-house was the scene of the interview ; the tenement called Ivyside being about as intolerable as a tenement can be. When Mr. Rutland asked for Miss

Wreford, Jane at once escorted him into the garden, observing that the paint was enough to poison pigs, and that her young lady was as good as obligated to live out of doors.

"Oh, Philip ! is that you ?" cried Anne, springing up, book in hand, her empty cup and saucer before her. "Why, I fancied you were in Vienna."

"And so I was the day before yesterday. My business there being concluded, I came home express, and arrived in London late last night. One of the first things I heard was that your father was about to marry again, almost immediately, and the lady was Mrs. Russell. Is it true, Anne ?"

"As true as Gospel ! I wish it were not. Oh, Philip, is it not dreadful ? And after my sweet mother, too ! And they actually wanted me to go to the wedding ! to countenance by my presence this shameful and wicked—yes, I call it *wicked*—marriage."

"Of course they would wish you to be present. Indeed, your absence would be an insult to your father, as well as to his wife. And I scarcely see how the marriage can be called '*wicked*.' Inexpedient I am almost sure it is, and I don't think it is wise, in any point of view ; but wicked, my dear Anne—no."

"Now, Philip, don't take their parts ; I shall feel desperate if you do. I longed for you to come home, thinking you would sympathise with me, if no one else did ; you were so fond of darling mother."

"Never was a sweeter, saintlier woman than your own mother, Anne. And how your father *can* bear another woman in her place so soon, is more than I can comprehend. But, as it is to be, it is of no use going into fits about it. Do you really mean that you are thinking of absenting yourself from the wedding-party ?"

"I do really mean it." And then Anne fully expounded herself, finishing up with, "I can't help it, Philip ! And the more I think of it, the wilder I get ! She regularly angled for father, you know, and she caught him."

"And he was very willing to be caught, depend upon it ; let us be just, and not lay all the blame at the woman's door. The last time I saw dear Mrs. Wreford, I knew

we should lose her, though I little thought how soon ; and I felt pretty certain who would be her successor."

"And yet father was broken-hearted about mother then ; he was quite wrapped up in her, as people say ; he scarcely ever left her. I am sure marrying again was one of the last things he thought of."

"I dare say it was, Anne dear. It is as I said ; there is nothing absolutely reprehensible in this marriage. The severest moralist has no right to condemn your father. It would have been *nicer*, I acknowledge, if he had waited a few months longer, but that, of course, is only a matter of taste. If he had married six months ago, it would have been highly indecent, but not *wicked*."

"I am sure it is bad enough to know that one's father is highly indecent."

"But he did *not* marry six months ago, so that case cannot be proved against him. And, really, when all is said and done, he is his own master ; he is a widower, and, therefore, free. He has chosen a very beautiful woman, about whom there is no sort of scandal, though many people—myself included—somehow do not like her. I believe she was a good wife to old Russell, though doubtless she married him for money and position only, and as regards the former she was disappointed. I think, Anne, the wisest thing to be done is to make the best of it."

"That is what Mrs. Stanbury said, and *she* seemed to think I was behaving in an unchristian way, and I am afraid I am. But, oh, dear ! how can I make the best of what has not a bit of good in it ? "

"There may be more good in it than you anticipate. You see, dear, you are too young to be at the head of your father's house, and your education is not nearly finished. It is only natural that he should marry again, and he might have made a worse choice ; we men do very foolish things, even sometimes at mature age. It is poor comfort, I know, Anne, but it does no earthly good to persist in looking at the dark side of things. And it seems to me that in setting yourself in opposition to your father and his bride, you may do yourself a great deal of harm, and lay the foundations of much discomfort and misery. My

advice is—accept the situation as gracefully as you can; protestation and opposition are worse than useless; cease from either, and begin at once to bend your will to circumstances."

"I believe you are right; but you cannot imagine how hard it is."

"Why not? I have had a step-mother of my own, and I greatly disliked the prospect of her coming; very soon I thanked God for sending her, and my father for his wise judgment in making her his wife."

"This is so different."

"You cannot be certain of that. Now, Anne, my dear girl, do be guided by me; you know you let me speak to you as freely as I do to Nellie, and I foresee no end of trouble for you if you continue in your present frame of feeling. Just *try* what a cheerful submission will do for you."

"I wonder what my mother would have me do?"

"If your mother could speak to you, she would say, I am convinced, 'My child, do not estrange yourself from your father; continue to be a dutiful daughter to him, and for his sake receive meekly and kindly the woman he loves!'"

"What do you think? He actually told me—*me*, my own mother's child, that he loved her—this Maud Russell—more than words could tell!"

"And would you have him marry Maud Russell or any other woman unless he loved her truly? Anne, I am afraid you are taking a distorted view of the whole affair. I think it showed how well your father thought of you, that he spoke to you—his child—scarcely yet a woman—in such a tone. He wanted to plead with you for himself as well as for Mrs. Russell. It was as much as saying, 'If in any way I seem to slight your mother's memory, bear with me, and be kind and pitiful!' And did you make no rejoinder, Anne?"

"No, I could not. I was trying to say something civil, when he said, 'Remember that Maud Russell and I are henceforth one, and if you pain and insult her you doubly pain and insult me.' And there was something in his tone and look that froze me up again. And when he was

going to kiss me I drew back, for I knew that he must have kissed *her*, not so long before. You see, I tell you all about it; I don't make better of myself than I am. Oh! I know I am horrid, and I hate myself almost as much as I hate her."

"You are talking very foolishly, Anne. As your true friend, I must tell you so. From all you say I must confess that I think your father has some claim to be displeased. A child has no right to reject a parent's embrace—no, not even if the parent have sinned, which your father has not. I am sure, dear, you must admit that you are wrong."

"Wrong! I know I am. I never in all my life felt so wrong. I feel in a wretched puzzle—in a tangle that never will come straight."

"God can make the worst tangle smooth and easy, if you do your own part patiently and humbly. And if He permits this marriage, it is for good in some way or other."

"I suppose so," said Anne, the large tears gathering in her eyes. "I will try—yes, Philip, I *will* try to be good. I will submit myself to father, and, for his sake, to her; but I hope they will let me go to school again."

"I have no doubt they will; it would be the best plan for all parties. Take courage, dear Anne; do the thing that is right, and trust for all the rest."

"And the thing that is right is to humble myself and own that I was wrong, and promise to do better for the future?"

"That is pretty nearly what I meant. I am so sure, Anne, that nothing would have grieved your dear mother so much as any discord between you two—the two she loved so dearly; and you know—or rather you will know some day—that she was equally devoted as a wife and as a mother."

"There never was anybody like her. Perhaps it is quite as well that some one utterly unlike should take her place. A faint, imperfect copy I could not bear. I much prefer a contrast."

"Which you will have. And now let us talk of something else. Don't you want to know all about Vienna and

Prague ? I have been to Prague, too, and stood beside 'the Moldan's rushing stream ;' and I have brought you some beautiful photos—and here they are."

A pleasant hour was spent in looking over and talking over the photographs, and then Philip took his departure, leaving Anne more like herself than she had been for many a day. After he was gone she sat a long time in the summer-house—how long she scarcely knew ; but she did not stir till the evening shades were falling, and a large round golden moon rising like a globe of amber above the trees. It must be nearly nine o'clock, she thought, and time to go in, though there was nothing to do within doors, and no place to sit in, save her own chamber and the disorderly study, full of odds and ends from other rooms, and smelling dreadfully of the paint and varnish. She gathered up her book and work-basket, and, turning towards the house, saw her father, with the moonlight on his face, standing at the open window of the dismantled dining-room.

"I'll go and speak at once," said she ; "if I don't do it now I never shall. He is looking at the moon ; lovers always do look at the moon, I believe, though *why*, I haven't the least idea, unless it is that they are all, more or less, a sort of lunatics ! How odd it must feel to be in love ! and how very odd it *is* to see one's own father in love. I wonder if he is thinking of Mrs. Russell ! I wonder if he remembers that other love-making, almost thirty years ago ? Now for it, Anne Wreford ! now, or never !"

In another minute she was at her father's side. He was evidently surprised, and had expected her to go into the house by the back hall-door without any notice of him, save, perhaps, a cold, formal "Good evening, father."

"Well, Anne !" said he, "how do you and the paint agree ?" He had not spoken so cordially since the outburst a fortnight ago. Anne made haste to "strike while the iron was hot," as she said afterwards ; she did not answer his question—she never even thought of answering it—but without the slightest preface, blurted out : "Father ! I am very sorry I behaved so ill to you a little while ago. I see now that I was wrong, and I am ready

to go to the wedding, if you still wish it ; and if you will let me, I will help you in getting things ready for—for Mrs. Russell."

Robert was rather startled, for he had found out that Anne was his own daughter in the matter of stubbornness, and he did not expect any voluntary concession from her, much less such an avowal as that to which he listened. He answered, however, rather complacently, "Ah ! I thought you would come to your senses before long !"

It was as much as Anne could do to bear it patiently; but she controlled her temper, and continued, "May I hope that you forgive me, father ?"

"Well, yes, I forgive you, as it is a first offence ; a second I should not so easily pardon ; a third, perhaps not at all."

"I will try to do as you wish," she replied, trembling with the effort she made to suppress the rising tears, and to keep back words that she would repent afterwards of having spoken. But she had not looked for so cold and stern a tone ; she had hoped to be met half way, if she humbled herself, and promised to amend her ways. She felt chilled, rebuffed, and disappointed, but she would not swerve from her determination ; she would have preferred to go straight to bed, but that would seem as if she were sulky, so she stood awhile on the stone steps, talking of the alterations, and asking some questions about the new furniture which was ordered for the drawing-room. And Robert condescended to be propitiated ; he even consulted her upon the question of some silvered mouldings for the rose-coloured boudoir. And the last thing, after they had said good-night, on the carpetless, whitewash-splashed landing, he called out, with his hand on the knob of his chamber door, "As for your dress, you had better consult Maud about it. Don't spare any expense ; I wish you to look well. Maud will know what is suitable for your age and position"—which speech was intended to show her that she might calculate on full pardon, and that she was expected to be one of the wedding guests.

Not the next day, but the one following, Mrs. Russell came again to lunch, which was served in that most convenient summer-house, the weather still continuing pro-

pitious. This time she did not bring Miss Gresley with her, nor did Mr. Wreford come home from business; Anne and her step-mother elect were alone, and the girl behaved wonderfully well, and even tried to convince herself that Mrs. Russell was sincere in her blandishments, her caresses, and her honeyed speeches. "It is such a comfort to me, Anne," she said, after a long series of protestations of affection, to which her auditor did her best to listen becomingly, "to find that you really are going to be good and kind to poor little me! I have been so unhappy! Even your dear papa could not console me. But I told him I was sure you would come round when you had time to reflect a little. I would not hear of his being angry with you. 'It's the most natural thing in the world,' I pleaded, 'and I like her all the better for it.' And, indeed, I do, my dear Anne; don't think *I* blame you for the repulsion which I know you feel towards myself. No, indeed! I admire you for it; your constancy to the memory of your sweet, sainted mother charms me; I think it beautiful—truly beautiful, my love! And now our little misunderstanding is quite over, is it not, my sweet girl? And you will help me to make your dear, dear papa happy? Oh! Anne, I love him so much! I did not know it was in me to love so absorbingly."

"Did you not love your husband?"

"I thought I did—I quite thought I did; and so I did—in a way. But this is the love of my life. I have never known such love as this! Ah, child, it is all Greek and Hebrew to you now: one day you will understand. And now about your dress—the dress, you know! You and I must drive to *Madame's* together. Or better still—we will send your photograph to *Worth*, then we shall be quite sure of making no mistake."

"Just as you please. I shall be quite satisfied with your choice, I am sure."

"You dear child! Don't be afraid that you will be slighted or neglected. I shall take the greatest pride in you. I mean to dress you beautifully, Anne, and to indulge you in all your little whims. I am sure we shall be immense friends, you and I—more like sisters

than mother and daughter, you know. You never had a sister, and I never had one either."

"And you will not expect me to call you—*mother*?" Anne's lips trembled as they framed the word.

"Oh, no! You may call me '*mamma*,' though, if you like."

"I should not so much mind that, I think. *She* was never '*mamma*' to me—always—always '*mother*.'"

"Or you may say '*Maud*,' if you please. I don't think your dear *papa* would be satisfied if I were only a formal '*Mrs. Wreford*' to you. Call me what you will, dear girl—only don't put any constraint upon yourself. If *papa* is vexed at any time I will soon set all right again. I think we had better decide to be on the footing of elder and younger sister—the older and married woman naturally taking the precedence."

CHAPTER XXXI.

BRIDAL BELLS.

By degrees order and beauty arose out of the chaos and confusion that reigned erewhile at Ivyside. The amber drawing-room and the pink and silver boudoir were in readiness to receive the bride; the garden was as gay as the season permitted, and the new conservatory, built out as a wing from the dining-room, was almost finished. The wedding-day was close at hand; Mr. Wreford was in the highest spirits, and comported himself with unexampled amiability. He spoke graciously to the servants; he was considerate to the workpeople; and he condescended to consult Anne upon many small arrangements, and even to joke with her—a familiarity so unprecedented that the girl could scarcely understand it, and felt more surprised and puzzled than delighted.

People now offered their congratulations, or condolences, pretty freely; and Anne had by this time schooled herself to receive them with perfect equanimity. Mrs. Willis was foremost amongst the condolers, who were by far more disagreeable than the congratulators. It was comparatively easy to keep silence when felicitations were the order of the day; but sympathy, indiscreetly and not very decorously expressed, required to be parried by words which should reprove, and yet not quite rebuff, the speakers; and no one gave Anne more trouble in this respect than Mrs. Willis. She had tried to expound herself a little to Mr. Wreford, as she overtook him on his way home from church on Sunday morning; but Robert's frown and chilly tone quenched even her irrepressible garrulity. She could speak more freely to Anne, and she resolved to avail herself of the first opportunity which should present itself, or to make an opportunity should there be no actual occasion for her calling on Miss Wreford. Accordingly she found out that Anne's subscription to a certain charity was almost due, for Robert had desired his daughter to keep up all her mother's subscriptions; and she at once determined to call at Ivyside, on the plea of wanting to make up her books for the society before she went away from home.

"I wouldn't, mamma, if I were you!" pleaded Eleanor. Her mother's interfering ways and frequent outspokeness jarred too often on her own finer susceptibilities. "I am sure, if I were Anne Wreford, I had rather not have to discuss the affair in any way."

"Nonsense!" was Mrs. Willis's rejoinder. "I know what I am about. I think it really my duty as a Christian woman to caution that poor child against the snares that may be preparing for her."

"What snares, mamma?"

"The worldliness which will surround her as soon as ever her step-mother is settled at Ivyside. Mrs. Russell is a sadly godless woman, from all I have heard, and I know positively that she plays at cards for money!"

"That is a pity; but what can Anne do?"

"Hold herself aloof from sinful contamination; show by her steadfast example that she condemns the evil thing."

"I do not think Anne will touch cards, and I should think she is quite too young to act as censor in her father's house. I wish you would let Anne Wreford alone, mamma."

"You always wish that I should leave undone all the things I propose to do, Eleanor, and it is extremely unbecoming in you to interfere in this uncalled-for manner; but I hope I know my duty as a Christian woman."

When it came to this, Eleanor invariably kept silence. She knew that expostulation was useless once her mother began to assert the vantage-ground of a Christian woman and her duties. Higher and better ground she scarcely could have taken; but, unfortunately, Mrs. Willis's standard of Christianity was peculiar, to say the least of it, and her idea of "duties" singular; for she was one of those who—

"Compound for sins they are inclined to,
By damning those they have no mind to."

She had no liking for cards, or for dramatic representations; even a concert or a flower-show she denounced as "worldly," and inconsistent with the Christian character. She dressed plainly because she preferred saving money to spending it on silks and velvets; and she never read novels, chiefly because she was so deficient in imagination that she was actually incapable of being interested in any other fiction than that furnished by the Religious Tract Society. Therefore cards, dancing, the theatre, and the concert-room she solemnly and unsparingly condemned; while, at the same time, she indulged herself without scruple in petty spites and scandals, in uncharitable criticisms on those who differed from her in opinion—especially theological opinion—and in taking to pieces her neighbours' characters generally; too frequently not taking the trouble to put them together again, albeit they stood in no need of repair.

Nevertheless, she had argued and talked herself into a strong and unassailable conviction of her own "sterling piety"—a phrase to which she was much addicted, as applied to persons of certain shibboleths and particular views, more or less openly, not to say violently, expressed. Also she loved to exhort and to rebuke, not always to the

edification of such persons as were unfortunate enough to be classed among those in whom she "took an interest," and seldom, if ever, to their comfort. As a rule, Mrs. Willis's friends were sadly ungrateful as regarded her frequent and self-imposed solicitude on their behalf. Anne always gave her "a wide berth," if she could do so without manifest rudeness; but what could she do when the enemy entered her own entrenchments, overstepping every defence, and demolishing the outworks at a blow? She positively sickened when Mrs. Willis's card was brought to her that fine September morning, as she sat in her own room writing a German exercise. She went downstairs, wondering in what manner of spirit she would return.

"My dear Anne! my poor child! how are you?" was the accost she received. And she would have been folded, maternal-wise, to her visitor's ample bosom, had she not backed an inch or two, and firmly stood her ground.

"Quite well, thank you," was Anne's quiet reply. "You are come for my subscription, I perceive?" for Mrs. Willis ostentatiously carried her collecting-book in her hand.

"Yes, my dear; I am going to Harrogate next week, and I never enjoy myself if any neglected duty presses on my conscience. Duty is a great thing, dear Anne—a very great thing! though occasionally it is difficult exactly to define it, and to see the way in which one should walk."

"I suppose so," was Anne's guarded answer. If the conversation could only be carried on impersonally, she would not mind so much. A little patience and some sacrifice of time would be demanded of her, in case she were doomed to a course of what some people irreverently called "Willis's Sermons," and that was all. She resolved not to say one word touching her own condition and experiences—if she could help it. She took out her purse, put down the required sum, and watched Mrs. Willis enter it in her book, devoutly wishing that she would go away now that her ostensible errand was completed; but she knew her too well to flatter herself that she was to escape so easily. She tried, therefore, to put

her off the scent—at least, to defer the evil day—by asking if Eleanor had quite got rid of her cold, and if the new housemaid were satisfactory. The subject of the housemaid would have been eagerly caught at on a less special occasion, for Mrs. Willis was one of those thrice troublesome and tiresome ladies who are always parading their domestic grievances, carrying kitchen and nursery with them wherever they chance to go, deplored the delinquencies of their unlucky servants, expatiating on their cares and anxieties as mothers, or, worse still, bewailing, with many a sigh and shake of their unwise heads, the shortcomings of their husbands! There are some people who never can be persuaded of the folly, the absolute impropriety, the indelicacy, of washing their dirty linen anywhere but *en famille*. It is meat and drink to them to air their grievances, to make sundry and manifold confidences when their lips ought to be sealed, to betray the weaknesses of those whose honour should be their own, to prate, and prate, and prate of their private matters till their auditors are alike wearied and disgusted. And of such was Mrs. Willis; but even the housemaid, who was *not* satisfactory—she made havoc with the best china and wore a “complexion-veil” on Sundays!—could not tempt her mistress to forego the opportunity she had with so much ingenuity secured. She might never have Anne to herself again, and it was just possible she might not be included in the new Mrs. Wreford’s visiting-list; so she answered as briefly as possible—Eleanor had quite lost her cold, and the housemaid was going away on Tuesday week. Then she girded up her loins, so to speak, and addressed herself right womanfully to the work in hand: “My poor child, how I grieve for you! I have wept and prayed for you, Anne.”

“Have you? That was very kind; but it was a pity you took so much trouble; I am very well and comfortable. You do not think that housemaid would suit Mrs. Kendrick, do you? She wants a general servant.”

This too transparent artifice met with no success whatever. Mrs. Willis coolly ignored the inquiry. “Ah!” she continued, “you put a brave front upon it, my dear; but I know—I know what a blow this must be to you.

And after being sole mistress of your father's house for the past year, it must be so hard to yield all to a newcomer and a stranger."

"We can scarcely call Mrs. Russell a stranger, and I shall not be sorry to give up my authority in the house to her; I am quite too young and inexperienced for the post I occupy. Besides, I want to go back to school; my education is anything but finished; and most widowers do marry again, you know."

"Ah! yes, my dear! And if your poor father had made a wiser choice, no one could blame him."

"I think it is very impertinent of people to blame him or to command him. What is it to any one but myself whom he marries? Surely, he is old enough to do just as he likes! I wish people would not chatter."

"Now, Anne, you are showing temper, and that is very wrong. Have you never heard that 'temper is everything'? If you do not learn to rule your moods now, while you are young, you will find it an almost impossible task in years to come."

Anne made a supreme effort to command herself, and replied—"I beg your pardon if I spoke hastily, but I cannot help feeling vexed when my father's actions are discussed out of the family. I suppose people will talk and gossip, but, if you please, I had rather not hear it."

"It is foolish to stick your head into a bush, and fancy no one sees you."

"I dare say it is foolish, but you must see it is not the thing for me to talk about this marriage. Of course, it pains me—it pained me horribly at first, almost past bearing—to know that another was to be put in my dear mother's place; but, equally, of course, father has a perfect right to please himself."

"Well, yes, of course! But a man in his position—and a Church member! And she not even a Dissenter—quite a woman of the world!"

"I am trying to make the best of it," resumed Anne, ignoring the reference to Mrs. Russell's irreligious character. "I confess I behaved very badly at first, but I see now that I ought not to sit in judgment on my own father,

and that it would be very foolish to set myself against Mrs. Russell beforehand."

"But honestly, now, can you say you like her?"

"I had rather not say anything about her."

"Well, my dear, I must own you are extremely prudent—rather too prudent for so young a person. For my part, I don't like to see old heads on young shoulders; and when it is an old friend like myself—your mother's friend, too——!"

But Anne was not to be seduced into any unguarded expression of her sentiments; and Mrs. Willis never had been her mother's friend. Circumstances had brought them into the same circle, and into some degree of association; but they had never been more than *acquaintances*. Also, Anne knew perfectly that any admission of hers, any revelation of her inner self, might as well be printed and posted on the church-doors as disclosed to Mrs. Willis. As well—and *better!* for her very words would then be given to the public gaze, while they would never reach the public ears intact if passed through certain channels, which the most charitable persons could not regard as "streams of truth." Anne's tormenter was a terrible Pharisee on the subject of *truth*, and she was extremely severe on all liars, black, white, and grey; on all fibbers, large and small; and on all misrepresenters and exagge-rators—*save one!* and that one was *Sarah Ellen Willis*.

"Well!" continued the lady, "if you will be so reserved, I can't help it. I really wanted to give you a little good advice; and, as it is, I *must* discharge my conscience. Take heed lest you fall into your step-mother's worldly and dissipated mode of life. Set yourself at once against all vain and worldly customs. Above all things, don't play cards, even for amusement."

"I cannot see any amusement in cards, myself. *Cribbage* and *berique* seem to me extremely foolish, only fit for children; but I *may* be wrong. Of course, playing for money my father never would allow in his house."

"Don't be too sure of that! A man very often—nay, I might say always—becomes utterly transmogrified, quite changed from his former self, under the influence of a second wife. Your mother's husband and Mrs. Russell's

husband will be different persons, as you will soon find out. Ah, Anne, you put on a brave face, but you little guess what is coming upon you!"

Anne's patience was rapidly wearing to a thread; a little more, and it would snap and float away like gossamer. She bethought herself of making a diversion by asking her visitor if she would like to look at the drawing-room in its new dress; and happily the bait took.

Next to being able to quote Anne's remarks, with variations, was the delight of seeing the new furniture, the fresh decorations, &c., and of describing them afterwards, with proper comments thereon, to all the friends whom she should chance to meet before she went into the country. So she graciously replied that she should very much like to see the alterations, and, without more ado, rose from her seat, ready to be conducted on a tour of inspection.

The drawing-room was highly commended, as "Beautiful! splendid! the perfection of taste!" Then followed the inevitable criticism—"But oh, my dear Anne! how changed from your dear mother's time! How changed, indeed, is everything since she went to glory! This is not quite the apartment, I fancy, for strangers and pilgrims on earth, is it now?"

Anne made no rejoinder; she had changed the scene, but not the character, of her annoyance. The spirit of the woman would have been the same had she been led up to the garrets or invited into the coal-cellars.

"This sort of thing," continued Mrs. Willis, viciously poking her sunshade into a sofa cushion of richest amber satin, "ministers to the indulgence of the flesh, and promotes the comfort of those that are at ease in Zion. All this ormolu, and buhl, and marquetry, all those vases and statuettes, all that costly drapery, are vanities, you know, Anne—nothing but vanities—things which perish in the using."

"I have no doubt they will wear out or get spoiled—some day," observed Anne, drily; "and so would painted deal or washing damask."

"Ah, ah! my dear!" And the shake of the head that accompanied these words would have been appalling had it not been ridiculous. The shabby poppies and corn-

flowers in Mrs. Willis's old lace bonnet vibrated as she spoke, and her sunshade—it was very much the worse for wear—trembled in her hand.

"But it looks very well, I must say," she resumed; "and it must have cost a mint of money. Your father is a rich man, no doubt—very rich, I suppose; but how very much better if he had given the *worth* of these things to the poor!"

"That sounds just a little like Judas," Anne could not help saying.

"Not at all, Anne! not at all! The precious ointment was spent upon the Master. All this show and luxury is simply for the enjoyment of the creature. However, nothing that I can say will influence anybody, I know. I would speak to Mr. Wreford himself, but my words, however faithfully spoken, would have no weight, I am well aware."

"Not the smallest weight," said Anne, emphatically.

As for the pink and silver boudoir, Mrs. Willis had not much to say about it, but she took mental notes of everything she observed for the benefit of her acquaintances. She even decided to give a little tea-party—ill as she could spare the time, and greatly as she disliked the expense—before she went to Harrogate. She shook her head gravely, and remarked that it was the sort of room for Venus or Hypatia—she meant "*Aspasia*,"—Pericles' *Aspasia*, I suppose!—or Cleopatra, or an opera-dancer lost to all sense of virtue, but not for a respectable Christian woman, the wife of a London merchant, and an esteemed Church member. She would not look at "*Una on her Lion*," and she turned away in disgust from "*Eve at the Fountain*," mistaking her for some profane, indecent, Pagan goddess. She stared at "*Clytie*," and then informed Anne that the creature looked like a "hussy," as no doubt she was, as all those sculptured and plaster-of-Paris images were, in fact—little Samuels excepted!

Anne murmured something about *Art* just by way of making a reply, and was told that *Art* was a snare; it was either heathenish, or superstitious, and always idolatrous.

The rooms being at length all examined, Anne hoped that she might be allowed to return to her German exercise, especially as her visitor had twice looked at her watch, and said something about an unusually early dinner. They stood on the landing, and considered the decorated ceiling, when suddenly Mrs. Willis caught sight of something that looked like a Paris *carton*, just visible through the half-open door of Anne's own chamber. How she came to know anything about Paris *cartons* is not to be explained; but she divined instantly what that foreign-looking case contained, and she burst out with, "Why, that *must* be your dress, Anne dear?"

"I dare say it is; I was to have it about this time, I remember."

"Is it only just come?"

"It must have come while I have been talking to you; it was not there half-an-hour ago."

"My dear Anne, do let me assist you in opening the box, and trying on the dress."

"I would not give you so much trouble; Jane or Susan will do all I want."

"It will be no trouble in the world. Why! it is your first real company-dress, I dare say! What is it?"

"I have not the least idea. I left it entirely to Mrs. Russell, and she sent my photograph and one of my best fitting dresses to Worth."

"Well, do let us see what this Worth has sent you. I hope she has good taste."

"Worth is *he*, not *she*!"

"What! a man-milliner? Does he sew and cut out himself?"

"I should imagine not; he is a very grand and independent personage. He only *composes* toilettes, and sometimes it is quite a favour to get him to give an opinion."

"Really now! What a strange man he must be! And does he try you on?"

"Certainly not."

"Now, Anne, do show me your dress before I go home. Eleanor will be so vexed if I cannot tell her all about it. She had white transparent muslin and *real* Valenciennes

—or else Maltese, I am not certain which—when she went to her cousin Ethelinda's wedding. Let me help you open the box. See! the nails have been already removed; we have only to unfasten that cord."

From sheer weariness Anne complied, and in a few minutes the dress was fully displayed.

"Very pretty, my dear, I must say—worldly, of course; but what else could you expect? And what colour do you call it? It isn't pink, far less salmon, and it's certainly not maize."

"It is *rose-de-thé*, I believe."

"Rose-der-tay, is it? What curious names these queer new shades have! But give me a good old-fashioned pink! Eleanor wanted a bonnet the other day trimmed with a colour called *cockleho*—something like the inside of those big shells you find on rockeries, you know. I wouldn't let her have it. 'No, my dear,' said I, 'you are an English girl, and you shall wear English colours with English names while you are under my care. Besides, pink of any sort is a worldly colour—'"

"And yet the world is full of roses, and God made them! And I have heard that the lilies of Palestine that our Saviour noticed are most beautifully tinted! The dyers do their best to imitate nature; which means that they try to copy God's handiwork. And wasn't Eleanor's colour—that she wanted, and didn't get—*coquelicot*?"

"I dare say it was. I don't know much about such vanities; it's the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit that I desire."

"I wish to goodness you had it!" was Anne's unuttered thought. If Mrs. Willis had been a person of her own age she might have said it. All she did say was, "*Coquelicot* would never suit Eleanor's complexion; she looks best in blue or lavender."

"So she does! Not that I wish her to study her complexion, though people do say she is wonderfully fair. I have always tried to impress upon her her own want of beauty! I have spoken of her as 'plain' in her hearing."

"But she is not plain, is she? I think she is pretty. She is rather pretty, surely?"

"Perhaps so; some people do say *very* pretty! Very much like what I was in my young days. What then? Prettiness is only skin-deep. The loveliest face must become loathsome in the grave; and 'handsome is as handsome does,' you know, my dear Anne; and doubtless you remember to what Solomon likens 'a fair woman without discretion.'"

"For all that I should like to be pretty—as pretty as Eleanor. Dear mother said there was no harm in liking a pretty face, any more than in admiring a pretty flower. And what is the use of telling a girl she is plain when she is not? She will find out the untruth some day, and then—then, I think, she will lose all confidence in the person who deceived her."

Mrs. Willis coloured, for had she not confessed to an untruth? a very white lie, certainly, but altogether inexcusable in a person who made a loud boast of her verity.

"You don't quite understand, Anne dear," she replied. "Perhaps at the moment I spoke Eleanor did look plain; she might have been out of temper, or not quite well. She always does look shockingly when she has influenza; fair-complexioned people always do, I believe. Now, let me see the dress on, and then I must run away."

But that was an ordeal to which Anne could not and would not submit. She firmly declined making an exhibition of herself for Mrs. Willis's benefit, and that lady had to go back to her home ungratified, and not a little chagrined at being defeated by a girl like Anne Wreford. She naturally consoled herself by railing at Anne for her conceit and obstinacy and her sharp temper, and by declaring that the Paris dress, which she described as being *pink and yellow*, would make the girl look the colour of a duck's foot, and then, as she said, she had, as far as was possible, delivered her conscience, and now she could not blame herself if the whole Ivyside household went to rack and ruin!

At length came the wedding morning, and Anne and her father and Philip Rutland, who had been invited at the eleventh hour, set forth in the new carriage just built expressly for the bride; and Anne felt as if she were somebody else in her beautiful dress and *chapeau* of

"*paille de riz*," with its exquisite garland of tea-roses. And it was only twelve months since she had shuddered at the sight of her crape and paramatta. By her side sat her father, with his white gloves in his hands, and the wedding-ring in his waistcoat pocket, as gay and blithesome a bridegroom as was ever seen. He deigned to talk affably with his young daughter; he praised her dress, told her she looked quite handsome in it, whispered to her that she would turn out a fine woman after all, if she took proper care!

Anne wondered what sort of care she must take in order to obtain so charming a result. He admired her bouquet, he pretended to smell the delicate roses in her hat; he seemed, indeed, overflowing with his happiness, to Anne's extreme bewilderment.

Opposite to her sat Philip, who had consented, somewhat against his judgment, to officiate as "best man." Mrs. Markham had persuaded him to "assist" at the ceremony, reminding him that if he meant to be Anne's staunch friend, it would never do to begin by appearing to slight her father's bride. It would be in the power of the new Mrs. Wreford to exclude him from her "at homes," and deny him the *entrée* of her house, should she imagine herself to have any kind of grudge against him. "And that sort of woman never forgives," added Mrs. Markham; "and there is no knowing how she may construe your refusal to officiate, when she knows, as she must, that you were most graciously invited by the bridegroom."

And so Philip Rutland yielded the point, and resolved to make himself as agreeable as in him lay. Besides, he could take care of Anne, and see that she was not overlooked, either at the wedding breakfast or in the evening at the dance which the Gresleys gave in honour of their kinswoman's most satisfactory alliance. And just before they started, Anne being out of earshot, Mr. Wreford said, "I declare Anne looks every bit of eighteen in that long-trained dress. I am afraid, Rutland, you and she will be taken for the happy pair as we drive along."

The idea did not at all displease Philip; but, somehow, it did displease him that it should have been suggested by Mr. Wreford.

They went, of course, straight to the church where the ceremony was to be performed. And, to Anne's disgust, it was an Episcopal church, for Mrs. Russell had softly, but firmly, declined to be married by a Nonconforming clergyman in a Nonconformist place of worship. Robert had opposed this decision as far as a man fathoms deep in love could oppose the goddess of his heart; but he had to submit with the best grace he could. "I should never feel myself a wife, if I were not married in proper Church-of-England style," she whispered appealingly, her soft, white hand clasped in her lover's, and her graceful head resting upon his shoulder. "Indeed, I must make it a point of conscience, dearest; and I am sure you will not refuse your poor Maud one of the last favours she will ask before she becomes your own—your very own—for life!"

But Robert made a little fight for his principles, nevertheless—a very little fight, though, and was consequently worsted. "That's a prejudice of yours, darling," was his reply; "you are married as lawfully in the poorest whitewashed conventicle, licensed for marriages, as in the proudest cathedral. Nay, the Registrar can tie the knot as securely as the Archbishop of Canterbury."

"But the irreligion of it, my dear Robert! I might say the utter profanity!"

"Well, the civil marriage is the real one, anyway. The blessing of the Church is purely optional, a matter of taste, or, if you will, of conscience."

"Of conscience, certainly. I will be a Dissenter, if you like, afterwards; but I *must* be married according to the order of the Church in which I was born, and in whose faith and ritual I have been duly instructed."

What more could Robert say? And, after all, what did it matter? he asked himself. He would be none the worse for the ceremony of the Establishment, and Maud would imagine herself very much the better. It was unkind and ungracious to contend for such a trifle; women were all more or less superstitious, and their prejudices on this head particularly ought to be deferred to. And so it came to pass that Maud won the day, and was married to Robert according to the form and usage of the Episcopal Church of England.

There was a crowd round the church gates as the trio alighted—the sort of crowd that commonly assembles on such occasions—one sometimes marvels whence! There was the usual company of nursemaids and perambulators; herds of dirty children from the nearest low quarter; a milkman, with his empty cans; half-a-dozen or more loud-voiced, brazen-faced women, on their way to, or from, the public-houses, where they took their matutinal drams; boys who ought to have been studying the three great R's, but were not; and a milliner's errand lad, with his wooden band-box—let us hope it was empty—at full swing; and fifty other people, a few of them of apparent respectability. The dirty children and the vulgar women set up a shout as Mr. Wreford's carriage drew up; it was supposed to convey the bridal party. "Oh, my!" cried one red-visaged matron; "ain't that gownd a stunner?"

"One might smell the roses on her hat," shouted another; "and such a booky! did you ever see such a booky?"

"She is but a slip of a girl to be married!" said a third; "and she did ought to be in white, with orange-blossoms and a veil. Which is her 'usban', I wonder—the young fellow or the old 'un?"

"Neither," replied a well-dressed woman, who stood a little apart from the gossips. "I know the bride as well as I know anybody, not to be over-intimate. My own sister is upper-maid in the house what she marries from. That's the bridegroom, coming first, ready to meet the bride, according to rule—the older man, I mean, with the white wax-like flowers in his button-hole. Don't he look spruce? And the young lady is his daughter. She and her step-ma will never hit it off, that's certain! The young gentleman is best man to the bridegroom. Here's the bride's party, coming full gallop! and the bride's a real beauty, fit to be a queen, though she is a widow lady."

And, truth to tell, Maud Russell did look every inch a queen, as, in her rich, sheeny robes, she swept into the church, leaning on the arm of Mr. Gresley, who had made quite an old *beau* of himself for the occasion. As Laura

Gresley had informed Anne, the bridal wreath and veil of maidens were denied to widows, however young and fair; but Mrs. Russell's milliners had so skilfully manipulated the materials in hand, that scarcely any one could be quite certain that the bride really wore a bonnet; it was rather a head-dress, with wonderful old point-lace-lappets mixed with stephanotis, cape jessamine, and other bridal flowers, only the orange-blossoms and the customary maidenhair being omitted.

Anne had never been at any wedding before, and she stood like one in a dream, fascinated and yet repelled, as the bridal procession approached the altar. By some means or other, Maud and her friends had ferreted out a *bishop*—though only a Colonial one, the Bishop of Hullabaloo, to wit—to perform the ceremony, “assisted” by the Vicar and the Rev. Mr. Montmorency-Vere-Smith, cousin-in-law to the bride (nine times removed)—an elderly gentleman, who lisped and mumbled his part of the sacred service as nervously as if he had been a juvenile deacon, newly ordained, and fearful of committing some egregious blunder. Anne scarcely heard what was said, till the fateful question was asked by the Colonial Bishop, “Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife?” which was, perhaps, quite as well, there being at present no *expurgated* edition of “The Form of Solemnisation of Holy Matrimony,” as by Act of Parliament established!

It seemed but a very brief affair to entail such life-long consequences, and yet it was very solemn—even awful, the girl thought; and when her father, repeating after the Bishop, said, “to love and to cherish till death us do part,” the tears overflowed, as she remembered that parting one short year ago—her father’s heart-stricken grief, her own deep, speechless agony! And now—now! But it would not do to think of it there; and almost before she had regained composure, she heard the irrevocable words, “I pronounce that they be man and wife together, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

Then came prayers and psalms—the former intoned by the Vicar, and the latter chanted by the choir. Last of all, an address, in which St. Peter and St. Paul figured

conspicuously, ending in "amazement," and all was over. They adjourned to the vestry, and the usual signing of names followed ; there was a hum of talk, a murmur of congratulations, a dispensing of fees, and the newly-married pair left the church, while the bells overhead clashed and clanged, and drowned the uproar of the crowd without, which by this time had increased to something like a mob.

There was nothing especial about the breakfast, saving that the bride's ninth cousin drank so much champagne that he was ill all the evening afterwards. It was "shocking bad wine," he afterwards declared, and Robert fully endorsed his testimony. Anne received a libation that ruined her *rose-de-thé* dress for ever—very much to her contentation, inasmuch as she had contemplated something of the same kind when she should be alone at Ivyside, in order that she might be quite sure of never wearing it again. Philip, who witnessed the accident, was delighted with the equanimity and composure with which she bore it.

By-and-by, the married couple were ready to depart, and Maud kissed and fondled Anne as if she were the darling of her heart. Mr. Wreford was so absorbed in devotion to his bride, that he quite forgot to say "Good-bye" to his daughter ; and till they were half way to London Bridge he did not remember the omission, for which Maud gently chided him.

How tired Anne was of the evening's festivities need not be told. Laura Gresley found her partners till she begged to be allowed to sit out all the rest of the dances. The best part was when Philip, finding her in a corner alone, wearied and sick with the headache which had come on hours ago, wrapped a great shawl about her, and took her out for a walk in the garden behind the house. The journey home seemed interminable, but even the most miserable experiences have their end, and so it came to pass that, as the rising sun gilded the house-tops of Hackney, Anne found herself once more at Ivyside, and at liberty to go to bed and forget herself in sleep.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A PERSIAN STORY.

MR. AND MRS. WREFORD did not return to Ivyside till the middle of November, and they reached London in one of the first fogs of the season. Anne had schooled herself to receive her father's wife with all possible cordiality, and she had strained every nerve to make their welcome complete. The dim, yellow twilight had become darkness about half-past three in the afternoon, and she took care that fires should be blazing in all the rooms, and the house lighted up from top to bottom. The gates were thrown wide open, and Anne herself, in a pretty French-grey merino, trimmed with swansdown, was in the drawing-room watching for the sound of wheels upon the gravel. Her heart was not very light; but she was doing her best to assume a cheerful countenance.

"I will not be a damper to them, the one cloud in all their sky," she said, as she sat with her crochet-work at her feet, and her hands folded listlessly in her lap. "I will *try* to do my duty, to be a good step-daughter to the woman who reigns in my lost darling's place. And I am to say 'papa' again! Well, I am not sorry for that; 'father' belonged to the dear old times that are gone for ever. It may be advisable to make fresh beginnings even in trifles such as these. But are they trifles? Is anything a trifle? Oh! mother, mother dear, how everything is changed! I have grown into a woman since you went away, and yet only a child-woman. Sometimes I feel more like a child than ever. I wish they would come! I want it over—I want this evening over! I hope I may behave quite well!"

But Anne had long to wait; the Calais steamer had made a bad passage, the train was a full half-hour behind its time, and the streets of London were so full of heavy fog that traffic was greatly impeded, and even dangerous. Dinner had been ordered for six—the travellers being due

not later than five o'clock—but at half-past six no one had arrived save the choking, chilling fog, which had got into the house, spite of coal-fires and blazing gas, and the cook was fuming over the dinner, which would be spoiled if delayed much longer.

"Cook's in a fine way about the fish," said Jane, as she came into the drawing-room, ostensibly to look after the fire, really to see how her young lady was getting on. "She waited a bit, when they didn't come, and then put the turbot on, knowing how pertikler master is about punctuality, and thinking every minute they must be here. And now the fish will be done to rags, she says, backen it as much as she will. And there's the roast, and the birds, to say nothing of the sauces—the gravy and the soup don't matter, nor yet the sweets. She is downright mad; and I don't wonder; it's enough to provoke a saint, having the coming-home dinner spoiled like that. Whatever is to be done, Miss Anne?"

"Nothing, I should say, but be patient. Of course, cook will 'backen' all she can. I do wish the dinner had been timed for seven. It is nearly that now. Is the fire all right in Mrs. Wreford's room?"

"Susan is just gone up; she forgot the staircase-window was opened about an inch, because of the smoke when the bedroom fires were lighted, and the fog has got in dreadful. You can see it, and smell it, too, on the landing, and outside it looks as if you could cut it with a knife. It's not—what do you call it, Miss Anne?—something like *suspicious*."

"Auspicious, I suppose you mean."

"Yes, that's it; only my memory is so bad for long words; but I mean a bad omen like."

"Nonsense, Jane! there are no such things as omens."

"I don't know, Miss Anne; where I lived when I was a little girl all the folks believed in signs and tokens, and—"

"Now, Jane, if you are going to tell me silly, dismal stories, I cannot listen to you; I must ask you to go downstairs."

"Well then, Miss Anne, I'll just hold my tongue; but I don't admire it, this coming home in fog like pea-soup,

and cold that chills you to the bone and marrow. Hark! that's wheels; after all, the dinner won't be more than half spoiled."

Yes, the carriage was at the door, and Anne, without giving herself a moment wherein to hesitate, ran down to receive the travellers. Her father was just leading his bride into the house as she reached the outer hall. He kissed her as they stood together just within the threshold, and said, in a formal yet affectionate tone, "Welcome, Maud, to your husband's home, to the home of which you are the mistress." Then he led her on, and they both saw Anne advancing with outstretched hand and a smile upon her face. How much it cost her to wear that smile no one guessed.

Mr. Wreford looked extremely well, and handsomer than ever; indeed, a handsomer couple was seldom seen, all the servants thought, as they silently contemplated the pair. Mrs. Wreford, however, was not looking her best; she was tired and cold and hungry, and—tell it not, dear friends!—she was miserably cross. Her husband was so glad to be at home again and out of the fog, that he was in the best of tempers, and radiant as became a bridegroom bringing home his newly-wedded wife.

Anne went upstairs with her step-mother, poked the fire, took the hot-water can from Susan, lighted the wax candles on the toilet-table, and seemed bent on making herself generally useful. Mrs. Wreford shivered and yawned and said as little as she could.

"Shall I help you dress—mamma?" she said, when she had done all she could about the room. She had decided to call Mrs. Wreford "mamma." Her father might object to "Maud" as too familiar, and Mrs. Wreford, for general use, would be too formal. Besides, the dear one gone had never been "mamma" to her. *She* would be "*mother*" always in the past, in the present, and in the days to come.

"Dress? Thank you, no," replied Mrs. Wreford, in a fretful tone. "I shall not go down again to-night. I am tired to death, and so sick with the rolling of that horrible steamer! Where is Léonie? I want my dressing-gown."

"There is no one named Léonie here."

"Yes, there is; at least, I hope she came safely in the cab with the luggage. I wonder we were not run into twenty times over, in spite of our lamps, and we came at a snail's pace. Just ring, will you? Léonie will answer it if she is in the house."

Anne rang, and a smart little Frenchwoman, with aquiline nose, and black, beady eyes, made her appearance. "Did madame ring?"

"Yes! Bring me my quilted-satin *robe-de-chambre*, and take away all these wraps; my velvet slippers are in the travelling bag. Put them on, and get me a cup of tea immediately."

The imperious tone in which this was spoken, and the air, *à la princesse*, of the new "mamma" with her head thrown back, and her shapely feet upon the fender, rather startled Anne; she had seen nothing of the kind before. She remembered instinctively what Laura Gresley had told her, that Mrs. Wreford would be "less bland and sugary" than Mrs. Russell! and her words appeared to be verified there and then. There was some conversation between mistress and maid, and Anne began to feel herself in the way. "Can I do nothing for you?" she asked, determined to make the best of it, and crushing down with resolute hand the struggling spirit of incipient rebellion. Her step-mother was treating her ungratefully, almost disrespectfully.

"Nothing at all, child, thank you. Léonie will do all I wish."

"But you will have some dinner?"

"Presently. I must have a cup of tea first; then, when Léonie has done my hair, I must have the *menu* sent up to me. What is that noise about?"

"It is the dinner-gong. I heard father leaving his dressing-room five minutes ago."

"Have the goodness to tell your *papa* that I wish to speak to him."

"Now? Before dinner?"

"Certainly. He ought to have come to ask whether I was ready and disposed for dinner."

Anne could scarcely believe her ears. Would her father

allow himself to be summoned in this imperious fashion ? Would he obey, or would he angrily refuse to defer his dinner another moment ? Filled with amaze, she went into the drawing-room, where Mr. Wreford impatiently awaited his wife that he might take her down to dinner.

"Where is your mamma ?" he asked sharply, seeing his daughter unaccompanied. "I hope she is not being dressed by that bothering Frenchwoman, who is a thief, if I ever saw one."

"Mrs. Russell is not coming down to dinner," said Anne, forgetting herself in her concern.

"Who ?" asked the father, sternly.

"I beg your pardon, I forgot. Mamma says she is so tired she cannot leave her room to-night, and she—she wishes to speak to you, if you please."

To Anne's unmitigated astonishment her father instantly rose, though the soup, as he well knew, was being placed upon the table, and he had just declared himself in a state of sheer starvation. He had really taken nothing since his breakfast at Abbeville, there being no time to lunch at Dover ; and, had there been abundant leisure, he was too qualmish, after the rough passage, to relish even the most delicate tit-bit. Nevertheless, he went without a word, and yet more—with a frown upon his face. Anne felt almost indignant; never would her mother have ordered him about so nonchalantly. It had been "have a wife and rule a wife" in past time ; it seemed that a new and, to the girl's mind, a most indecorous *régime* was impending. Once she had secretly quarrelled with her father for playing the autocrat in his own house ; now she was provoked because he so meekly relinquished his prerogatives.

Mr. Wreford came back in a few minutes, and desired Anne to take her seat in the dining-room ; she did not take the vacant place at the end of the table. A delicate little repast, and a bottle of *Chateau Yquem*, was sent up to Mrs. Wreford. The dinner was very good, considering how much it had been delayed, but it was rather expeditiously despatched; Mr. Wreford was evidently most anxious to rejoin his bride. He left the table as the dessert was being arranged, told Anne to send coffee

to Mrs. Wreford's room in half-an-hour, and disappeared, carelessly wishing her "good-night." He came back again, however, in less than five minutes, and carried off a dish of luscious grapes, which had been fancied by the lady upstairs. Anne could scarcely believe that it was indeed her own stern, grave father, who had come back from Italy; she had not imagined that he could be so completely metamorphosed.

Her surprise was not lessened as time slipped by. Mrs. Wreford had begun as she intended to go on; before the first week was over she had dismissed all the servants, excepting her own French maid. Anne begged so hard for Jane, that she was permitted to remain as her own attendant, on certain stringent conditions, and "*for the present!*" All old rules and regulations were done away with, changes of every kind were the order of the day, and preparations were being made for a series of splendid entertainments. And Robert remained docile and mildly complacent, though some of the new rules and institutions must have annoyed him exceedingly. Never was a man more completely subjugated than Robert Wreford, erst the most imperious and uncompromising and exacting of his sex. But it was speedily apparent that he was beginning to feel the restraint, though he seemed too much cowed to make any resistance as yet.

"Wait a bit," said Jane, as she was taking tea one evening with one of her old fellow-servants discharged by the new mistress—"wait a bit, I say; and if he don't kick over the traces before long, I am not a living woman! Why, he has taken more tyranny and *sauce* day by day from this fine madam than he ever took from old missis all the while I lived in the house. *She* was as meek as a lamb even when he was like a raging lion, bless her! Well, it's fun to see him nicely served out, and he do wince, sometimes; but it didn't ought to be—a man should be master of his own house."

Which Jane's master certainly was *not*! Anne said nothing, but marvelled when the explosion would take place. Meanwhile, she grew more and more uncomfortable.

"What *has* she done to father?" she said one day to

Mrs. Markham, whom now she frequently visited. "I cannot understand it in the least; it almost makes one believe in wicked necromancy."

"I think she '*killed the cat*' on her wedding-day," replied Mrs. Markham.

"Whatever do you mean?"

"Did you never hear that old Persian story? No? Then, let me tell it you. Once upon a time, in days of yore, there lived a Persian something—I forget whether he was King, or Shah, or Satrap, or what—but I will call him *King*. And he fell crazily in love with a certain princess of unrivalled beauty and indomitable pride. He was warned that her temper was so fierce that no man could expect comfort, far less happiness, as *her* husband; that her passions were so furious that her women fled from her in terror when anything happened to arouse her anger. It was even said that she had taken the life of more than one of her attendants, and that no one ever had, or ever could have, the slightest control over her.

"Nevertheless, the infatuated king persisted in his suit, and when his prime minister remonstrated, he replied that he was not afraid, but that he could tame the shrew, and reduce her to instant obedience. So the wedding-day was fixed, and the royal pair were united with all possible pageantry and solemnity. Now, the princess had a pet-cat—a beautiful Angora—whom she indulged in every liberty; the only creature she had ever been known to fondle or to love! No sooner was the ceremony concluded, and the bridal pair alone, than the king, pretending to be seized by sudden fury, drew his sword, and with one fell blow cut off the purring favourite's head. In vain the princess tried to storm and fume; she was frightened out of her senses, for her bridegroom, still brandishing his naked sword, declared ferociously that if ever she opposed him, he would cut off *her* head, as he had cut off the cat's! She was conquered; from that day she became a meek and docile wife; she had found her master, and I believe the story says 'they lived happy ever after!'"

"Is that all?"

"Not quite. The prime minister was so charmed with

the result of his master's diplomacy that he resolved to follow his example, for he was continually vexed by a shrewish and violent-tempered wife, to whom, however, he had been married for several years. Accordingly, one day he entered his wife's chamber—she, too, had a beautiful pet cat, I should remark—pretended to go into a furious passion, drew his sword, and killed poor pussy on the instant. Alas ! instead of the sudden transmogrification of the vixen, the offended lady flew at him, called her maidens to her assistance, and gave her lord a good sound beating, tearing his hair, scratching his face, and spitting on him in her contempt; nor did she ever quite forgive him, and he had to be meeker, and to eat more humble pie than ever.

“ The unhappy courtier, as soon as he was presentable, went to tell his pitiful story to his sovereign, who only laughed when he heard how he had been copied. ‘ I did just as you did, sire,’ moaned the miserable man; ‘ I imitated you to the letter, and my wife was—I beg your pardon—not quite such a fury as her majesty before you married and subdued her ! How is it that I failed when you, sire, succeeded so entirely ? ’ ‘ Foolish man ! ’ replied the monarch; ‘ *I killed the cat on my wedding-day !* On the next day I should have succeeded far less easily; on the next it would have been a still more difficult feat; on the next all but an impossibility; at the end of a month, an altogether ridiculous and highly dangerous performance.’ ‘ Ah ! ’ sighed the courtier, ‘ I perceive my error; a man who wishes to hold his own must kill the cat on his wedding-day, and not a moment later ! ’ ”

“ It is a funny story, and not a very nice one, but full of meaning. I suppose in father’s case the process was reversed, and it was the wife who killed the cat on the wedding-day—certainly during the wedding-tour ! ”

And Anne was right; Mrs. Wreford had fully established her position before the first week of her married life was over; for, as she told herself, “ there is nothing like striking while the iron is hot; and as you begin so you must go on, whether you choose it or not, and I mean to be mistress and queen regnant this time, and no mistake ! ”

About Christmas, Anne inquired if she might not go back to school, and she was told that she must *ask her mamma!* "I shall leave all that sort of thing to your mamma," said Robert, nervously; "everything at home is her department—I rule in Fenchurch Street."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"I NEVER LOVED HER."

"Go back to school, child? That is just where you ought to have been all along. You should have gone back to Madame de la Tour's a year ago, at the earliest, instead of playing at being mistress of Ivyside all those months before I came—wasting valuable time, and making yourself supremely ridiculous. Nothing can be more absurd than a raw school-girl—a bread-and-butter miss—pretending to be a grown-up woman, and apeing the style and manners of her elders."

Considering that poor Anne had been expressly enjoined to put the question to her step-mother, and that she had put it in the meekest manner, this speech was certainly unkind, not to say unjust, for pretension and assumption of any sort were by no means amongst her faults. She was naturally too sincere to pretend, and too proud to assume; if there was anything in the world Anne hated and despised, it was *sham* and *tinsel*—the hypocrisy of taking up a false position, and pretending to be, either in part or altogether, what she actually was not. Anne's foible was, rather, a harsh, uncompromising integrity, that often caused her to appear *brusque* and ungracious, almost uncharitable. She had no one to explain to her that virtues, unevenly balanced, are apt to confound themselves with vices—that some of the highest qualities and attributes of character are sure, in process of time, to degenerate into the lowest, if exclusively and unduly culti-

vated. She replied now, rather hotly: "I was mistress of this house sorely against my will; and while I was mistress I made no pastime of it, I can assure you. I am quite certain, too, that I never pretended to be anything but a school-girl, only my father needed some one to make him comfortable."

Mrs. Wreford burst out laughing.

"Very comfortable you must have made him, my dear Anne, with that sweet temper of yours! There is a great deal to be said in extenuation, I know, for it requires very little penetration to discover that you are a spoiled child, most injudiciously brought up—or, I should rather say, not brought up at all; left to bring up yourself at your own sweet will. But really, at your age, and such a great girl as you are, looking quite womanly, you *ought* to try and control your fiery passions, to cure yourself of this impatient spirit of rejoinder. If you are such a vixen at fifteen, what will you be at five-and-thirty—and what at fifty—but a cantankerous, peevish old maid, avoided and disliked by all your acquaintances?"

"Perhaps I may not live to be fifty, and it is not absolutely certain that I shall be an old maid, though I think it highly probable."

"So probable that there need be next to no doubt about it, if you do not at once begin to curb that unruly member of yours; and you know what St. Paul says about the unbridled tongue, that it is a fire, a world of iniquity, and that it is set on fire of *hell*!"

"I don't think St. Paul ever said anything of the kind, though I know St. James did; and I think he was quite right—the tongue *is* a very unruly member."

And there was a significance in her tone that her step-mother could scarcely fail to interpret. She did not, however, make any observation. She did not care to have a tilt with Anne, for if it came to a war of words the young girl was as likely as not to come off conqueror; also, she preferred that there should be a certain appearance of amicable relationship between them. She went on turning over a selection of new music just sent in, and was silent.

Anne waited a moment, expecting a Roland for her

Oliver ; but as none came, and Mrs. Wreford betook herself to warbling snatches of operatic airs, Anne felt that it behoved her to return again *à ses moutons*. It was advisable to obtain a direct answer to her inquiry. Almost impatiently Mrs. Wreford thrust aside a new German *Lied*, and said, "Of course you may go back to school ; and it is not, I can tell you, so much a question of 'may' as of 'must.' You are very politic, putting it in this way, Miss Anne ; but let me assure you I only waited till Christmas was fairly over to insist upon it ! When I accepted your dear papa as my husband I never intended to encumber myself with a step-daughter continually at home. If you had been amiable, I might have been glad of your society. As it is, I am sure we are better apart."

"I entirely agree with you. Will you write, then—or will my father write to Madame ? "

"I will not have your papa troubled about any such trifles—he has worries enough of his own in the City. No good wife permits her husband to be burdened by domestic arrangements ; if you ever are married—and, really, very queer girls do marry sometimes, if they are known to have, or *supposed* to have, a little money !—remember what I say. You can write to your governess yourself ; you know her well enough, and you are not a baby. Write and request an early answer, as to whether she can immediately receive you."

"She wrote to me scarcely two months ago ; we have corresponded occasionally ever since I left the *Maison de la Tour*, and she assured me that she would keep a place vacant for me, even though she had to stretch a point or two—her numbers being strictly limited."

"No doubt she will keep a place for you, *bon gré mal gré*. The French, whether governesses, hotel-keepers, or milliners, have a thorough appreciation of English bank cheques. But on second thoughts, I will write to Madame myself ; and all you have to do is to get ready as quickly as you can."

"She will try to poison Madame's mind against me," thought Anne, as she began to turn over her drawers, with a view to packing ; "but I don't know that I need concern myself about *that* ! Madame knows pretty well

what I am, and she is a downright sensible woman, not easily prejudiced for or against a person, unless I am much mistaken. One thing is sure—I shall never get on with Mrs. Wreford; we should always clash. Somehow she contrives to bring out the evil that is in my character; it would be one long, weary battle with myself, as well as with her, if I stayed at home; and then, as Mrs. Markham says, we meet on unequal grounds. Oh! it is far best to leave it all. If we cannot be exactly friends, we need not be enemies, with the sea between us; and, really, it is quite time I resumed my studies in good earnest. I have not actually lost a year or more, as Mrs. Wreford and some other people have told me; for I have kept up my French and my German, and I have learned a great deal in one way or other. Dearest mother used to tell me that books did not teach everything in the world. Ah, no! I have been at school—ever since I came back from Paris. Alas! what a harsh and bitter schoolmistress Experience can be! And what a strange going away this will seem! how unlike my first or my last leaving home! How little now I shall leave behind me, for father does not want me; I am positive he does not wish me to remain here. Besides, I have nothing to do; I have lost my place in the house, and I do not care to be altogether a cipher in my own home—the home that once was *hers*! Oh! mother darling, if you could but know how desolate your poor Anne is!"

There was a large dinner-party that night, at which Anne was not present. Mrs. Wreford did not approve of girls in the school-room appearing on such occasions. It was one of her convictions, and she very often aired it by discussing the question, that girls should "stay in" absolutely till they were ready to "come out." Of course Anne *could* come down to dessert, like other children, and spend an hour in the drawing-room afterwards with the ladies; but as she was so unfortunately tall and *gauche*, it was not to be thought of. Such a female *hobble-de-hoy* was best kept in the background. And in the background Anne very willingly remained, though it vexed her a little to find herself forbidden to enter the rooms where she had been sole mistress not many months before. Jane

vowed that "it just riled her, that it did, to see her young lady mewed-up as if she wasn't fit to be looked at; and if Miss Anne went, she'd go, too."

Three days elapsed, and then spake the oracle. "Anne, I have heard from Madame, and she is quite ready for you. You can go as soon as you please."

"But shall I travel alone?"

"I do not see why you should not; you have taken the journey before; you know the road, and speak the language. It does girls no end of good to throw them on their own resources."

"But I have heard papa say——"

"Never mind what you heard your papa say! He said a good many things under the old administration that he would not dream of saying now" (that was true enough, Anne thought). "If you were noticeable for personal charms it would be a different matter, for I don't approve of *pretty* girls roaming the world by themselves; but with your swarthy complexion and awkward carriage, to say nothing of the sullen expression you so frequently assume, there is nothing to be apprehended on the score of unwelcome attentions from the other sex. Indeed, when 'unprotected females,' as they are called, of any age are insulted or annoyed, it is commonly their own fault. Keep your veil down, look at the landscape, or read; don't speak unless you are spoken to, and then reply in as few words as possible, and, depend upon it, you will not be remarked."

"I am not afraid of being remarked—people have always been very kind to me when I travelled; but Madame is so very particular about *les convenances*, that——"

"Leave Madame to me. Tell her that *I* made all arrangements. Now you had better go at once and see to your packing."

"When shall I be ready?"

"Why not start to-morrow morning? take the tidal-train to Dover—there is a *Bradshaw* in the library."

"To-morrow! That would be too much of a hurry. Besides, there are several things I should attend to before I leave home for—I don't know how long."

"I shall advise your father to arrange for your continuance abroad till your education is completed. You have reached an important age; you are terribly backward, and you ought not to be disturbed in your studies. If you are wanting anything, you can buy it in Paris. Why encumber yourself with useless luggage?"

"But do you really mean to-morrow morning?"

"Of course I do. How tiresome you are, child! don't you see I am deep in the third volume of this novel that all the world is talking about? But you really are very stupid in such matters; you sadly want perception."

"But—mamma—I *cannot* go to-morrow; indeed I *cannot!*"

"That is a word I never permit to be used by any one over whom I have any authority. Why *cannot* you?"

"For many reasons; for one thing, the laundress will not send home my clothes till to-morrow evening, and my travelling-dress needs alterations; you said so yourself, and chid me for wearing such a misfit. Then, I ought to say 'good-bye' to my friends—my special friends, I mean,—Mrs. Stanbury and Maria Meredith, Mrs. Markham, and—"

"Nonsense! I wonder you don't propose to take the brougham round, and leave your P.P.C. cards on everybody."

"And," resumed Anne, not heeding the interruption—"and Philip—oh! and several people! I know Miss Rose wants very much to see me. Besides, I should wish to spend one more Sunday at home, to go for the last time—for several years, probably—to my own church, to hear my own pastor, and see the faces of my own people, and join in the hymns I know, and, above all, sit in the pew where I used to sit with—*her*."

"Now, really, Anne, if you turn sentimental, you will make me ill. Such utter nonsense, enough to make one sick. Your own *church* indeed!—a miserable, ugly, dull, dark meeting-house! If it were a beautiful, old country church, now, with ancient tombs, crusaders, and that sort of thing, a grey, ivied tower and lovely chiming bells, I could understand it; or if it were a cathedral—'a dim and mighty minster of old time,' as Mrs. Hemans puts it

—with anthems and choristers, and the pealing organ and stained windows—no! ‘storied windows richly dight,’ isn’t it?—I could sympathise with you somewhat. But that hideous conventicle, and those vulgarians you call your own people, and those hymns screamed out of tune, and out of time, and your ‘own pastor,’ who is no more in holy orders than I am—a miserable, unpolished, ignorant schismatic. Yes! look as fierce as you please; but it is true, nevertheless. I hate Dissenters!”

“And yet you married my father, knowing him to be a decided Nonconformist!”

“I married your father, knowing him to be a sensible man, who needed only the proper influences to become a good, sound Churchman. The force of circumstances made him a Dissenter; the force of circumstances will make him a staunch Episcopalian.”

“I don’t think it; but that is neither here nor there. I was not talking of papa, but of myself. Mamma, *please!*—I must stay till next week. I could be quite ready on Wednesday, and this is Friday. You need not be so very anxious to be rid of me; I am willing to go, and if I return under three years, it will not be of my own accord.”

“This is simple rebellion. I will not be opposed; I have said that you shall take the tidal-train at 12.15 to-morrow. You leave here by ten at the latest. It is a long drive to Victoria. Now, let me hear no more nonsense; a trunk or two can be sent after you, *par grande vitesse*, if you like.”

“But I can’t—I can’t——!”

“I have told you already I never listen to such protestations. Have the goodness to cease and obey immediately. No one in my house shall say ‘cannot,’ when I issue a command.”

“Then,” said Anne, with flashing eyes, and ash-white cheeks—“then, *I will not.*”

“We shall see!” And Mrs. Wreford also turned deathly pale with anger; and her tone was quiet and dogged as her step-daughter’s. It was a case, evidently, of Greek meeting Greek; but an impartial observer

would have decided that it was the matron who threw down the gauntlet, which the girl, at last, took up, out of sheer desperation. Never had her father, even, been so imperious and so scornful; never had *he* addressed her in such fashion.

And Anne was in her sixteenth year, too much of a woman to be treated as a wilful child; too much of a child to exercise over herself that absolute control which would have sealed her lips.

She was leaving the room, when Mrs. Wreford seized her by the arm. Oh! those snowy, slender fingers had plenty of strength in them! Anne stood still, nor spake any word, but she looked defiance with unquailing eyes and glowing cheeks, for the colour came back more quickly than it receded, and for the moment she looked positively handsome—nay, *beautiful!*—a Cassandra, a Pythoness, or a Judith!—to her step-mother's extreme astonishment. "Stay!" said she, and the sleek white fingers grasped the girl's arm, just above the elbow, like a vice; "you will repent this, Miss Wreford; you have done a bad morning's work for yourself, young lady, as you will find. It is in vain that you resist. I shall send Léonie, and Dawkes, the housemaid, to your room, with orders to undertake your packing. I have said it! You leave this by ten o'clock to-morrow morning, ready or not ready—at least, your travelling-bag can go with you. You hear what I say?"

"I hear—will you let go my arm? It will be black and blue to-morrow! I thought only naughty children and low-bred women *pinched*."

Mrs. Wreford hastily relaxed her hold; daring and haughty as she was, it occurred to her that she might be going a little too far—it was just possible that Robert might object to this unceremonious treatment of his daughter, this summary ejectment, and she could scarcely be spirited away without his knowledge. "Go!" she said, coldly and sternly; "you will remain in your room till the evening; I do not wish for your company at luncheon."

Thus released, Anne turned once more to the door, when suddenly it opened, and in tripped Miss Laura

Gresley, who made herself very much at home at Ivyside. "My stars!" she cried, in unrepressed astonishment—she was given to exclamations rarely heard from young ladies' lips—"whatever is the row? Are you quarrelling, fighting, or are you only rehearsing for private theatricals? Why, Maud! you are a tragedy queen, spoilt; it's a thousand pities you are not upon the boards—a second Mrs. Siddons lost to the drama-loving public! What's it all about?"

"I wish you would come into the house like a civilised person, Laura, and permit yourself to be properly announced," said Mrs. Wreford, extremely vexed at being caught in so undignified a pose. "There is nothing of any account the matter; I had occasion to speak very plainly to Anne, and she was insolent, and pretended to defy me."

"I should say that girl would never pretend anything; if she defy you, depend upon it she does defy. I say, Maud, you *were* in a wax! I thought you were going to beat your daughter."

"It would have served her right if I had given her a small castigation; it is a pity she is too old for the rod. But I will break her proud spirit, or my name is not Maud Russell—I mean, Wreford."

"You don't seem to be altogether certain what your name really is. But now, Maud, let me give you a piece of advice. It is not often I trouble myself to counsel my foolish fellow-creatures; but it seems to me that you are going on quite a wrong tack, and you'll have your husband down upon you if you don't mind your p's and q's. Let your step-daughter alone as far as you can, don't exasperate her, and send her to some French or German school before she is a month older."

"That is precisely the point at issue; I have arranged for her to go to school—to her old school in Paris—to-morrow; Madame is ready to receive her, and she declines to take the journey."

"Let me talk to her; I'll bring her to reason. I am sure the girl's not a bad sort, Maud, if you knew the way to manage her."

"Thank you; I always attend to my own affairs, and I object to interference—as you know."

"Very well! I only wanted to spare you the trouble of having a regular shindy with the girl, and possibly with your husband. But if you like to fight it out I am sure I don't object; '*chacun à son goût*,' *ma belle cousine!* and your '*goût*' was always—ever since I have known you, at least—for the belligerent! I am come to have luncheon with you. I want to take the pattern of that *fichu*, or pelerine of yours, or whatever it is."

"You are welcome to the pattern, and welcome to your luncheon, but I don't want to talk. I've a kettledrum at five, and I must calm my nerves, which are altogether unstrung. I'll ring for some of my mixture; Léonie recommended it; she says no lady with nerves ought ever to be without it."

"Thank goodness I'm a lady without nerves! I don't believe in chloric-ether or red-lavender; I go in for homœopathy, you know—all sensible people are homœopaths. Now, I advise *ignatia*—it's certain cure for lovesickness and bad-temper."

"For which malady are you prescribing, pray?"

"For the latter, of course! As for the former, you don't know what it is! You never were in love in your life, though you play at it very prettily. Poor Robert Wreford, I hope he enjoys his fool's Paradise!"

Maud rang for her mixture, drank off a wine-glass full of it, and presently declared herself much better, though Miss Gresley assured her that the washerwoman's dose of gin and peppermint, or, more effective still as a "pick-me-up," gin and bitters, would have had the same effect, and at the same time been cheaper. Luncheon soon followed, and both ladies did justice to the delicate fare set before them, and found a good deal to say. Curiously enough, Mrs. Wreford never treated Miss Gresley with the disdain and *hauteur* that would have been the portion of any one else daring to speak her mind so very plainly, and to criticise her conduct as freely as unflatteringly. Over their sweetbread, stewed cheese, and almond cheesecakes, with a little bottle of very choice Burgundy, the ladies conversed rather freely, and so Miss Gresley came to understand the true state of the case. "So," she said, at last, when she had quite finished her

repast, "it is a question of time, simply? Anne wants to go next week; you despatch her by the tidal-train to-morrow—*why?*"

"Because I choose. If I had known she would have made such a fuss, I might have let her name her day; but having told her she *must* go, she *must*! I will be obeyed; if I let her get the mastery now, what may I not expect in the future?"

"A battle is sometimes better lost than won. Depend upon it, she will appeal to her father."

"I shall not permit it."

"How can you help it? You can't shut her up as if she were six years old. You can't bundle her off to-morrow morning without his knowledge. And it is but too probable that he will think you exceed the limits of your authority. Now, Maud, you can't afford to set your husband at defiance—at least, not yet. There are those bills to be paid, you know; if I mistake not, Mr. Wreford will scarcely feel himself complimented by being called upon to pay the last two years' bills for Mrs. Russell. Take my advice—it's quite disinterested—condone Anne Wreford's fault, and let her stay till Wednesday. It cannot make any difference to you, and what is the use of making an enemy of the girl? You may need her good-will some day. It's my maxim never to quarrel with anybody, because I never know how soon I may want anybody to grant me a favour."

"It is not likely that I shall require, at any time, a favour of Anne, and if I yield now, the concession may be considered a precedent."

"Very well; a wilful woman must have her way; but I think you are behaving ridiculously. It appears to me that your aim is to drive the girl to extremities, that you really wish to force her to a declaration of hostilities."

"My domestic policy is no business of yours, Laura."

"Certainly not; I don't care how soon you and Mr. Wreford dissolve partnership. I thought I would discharge my conscience, for once, and I have done it. *Voilà tout!* Now, let us talk of something else."

Meanwhile Anne had gone, not to her own room, where she would be momentarily expecting the advent of Madlle.

Léonie and Miss Dawkes, but to an unused attic, which no one was likely to invade. There, on a dusty travelling trunk, she sat her down, too miserable to cry, too agitated to reflect. At first, her indignation against her step-mother burned fiercely; her arm still ached from the pressure of those taper, rose-tipped fingers, and though the day was intensely cold, she felt oppressed and hot. By degrees she cooled, both mentally and corporeally, and for a long while she sat with her face resting on her hands, which leaned upon some old cushions banished from the lower rooms. Tears came at length, and then she felt quieter, and more able to breathe. "Now, what shall I do?" she meditated; "I suppose I had no right to speak to her as I did, exasperating as she was. She is my father's wife, and the mistress of his house—would that she were neither. Shall I retract that '*I will not*'? Shall I apologise? There are some people who don't—who can't appreciate humility; and she is one of them. One is not obliged to lie down to be conveniently trampled upon by the oppressor; and yet our Lord said, 'Blessed are the meek.' How far should meekness go, I wonder—where should resistance begin? I am afraid I ought to submit to her! But it is dreadful, horrible, unbearable, being sent away in this abrupt fashion, as if I were a criminal—as if I were sentenced to punishment for some abominable misdemeanour! I did try to bear with her! I did try to be patient and forbearing; God knows I did, that is one great comfort. I don't think I could help being angry, especially when she laid hands on me; I was never so touched in all my life before. But I must not *cherish* anger; I must not let the sun go down on my wrath, that is certain."

And then, after another half-hour's meditation, during which she shed some of those inexpressibly bitter tears which fall unconsciously, she rose to go down to her own room. She was cold enough now; she shivered and felt faint, and all her limbs were cramped and aching. She quite expected to find the maids busy with her wardrobe, but the room was exactly as she had left it, only the fire had burnt out. Evidently no one had been there; perhaps, after all, Mrs. Wreford had relented. She struck a

match, and succeeded in rekindling the fire; then she thought she would pack some of her things—they would be ready, at all events. There were some possessions she would not willingly leave behind her, to be handled carelessly, and she was proceeding to clear one of her drawers, when she heard a gentle tapping at her door, and naturally supposed that her unwelcome assistants had arrived.

But, to her surprise, it was Laura Gresley who entered, and, without any pretence of salutation, at once commenced: "What is it all about, Anne? Why can't Maud and you put your horses together?"

"I am sure I don't know," sighed Anne; "I am sure I have tried to conciliate her. I behaved badly once—just at the first, as you know better than anybody; but ever since she came home I have been submissive, and I have always recognised her authority. I wish I had never seen her! I wish we had not gone to Etretat that autumn! I wish father had married any other, or almost any other, woman! But, as he has made her his wife, and nothing can undo what has been done, I would behave properly to her, if she would let me."

"Perhaps you have been too submissive. I know Maud of old; give her an inch, or the tenth part of an inch, and she will take an ell—ay! and as many ells as she can appropriate, where it is a question of arbitrary rule. Why do you object to go to school, Anne? Only last week you said you wanted to go."

"And so I do. But how can I like to be sent away, as if I were in dire disgrace, at twenty-four hours' notice? I only asked for three or four days to prepare and to say good-bye to several friends, for I know that it may be years before I am at home again."

"That was not unreasonable. What does Maud mean by these hurried measures?"

"I don't know in the least. But I suppose I shall have to go; it is of no use to make a disturbance."

"I should say, '*don't go!*' At any rate, you may leave it to Mr. Wreford."

"And he will leave it to Mrs. Wreford! You cannot imagine the sway she has over him. I should not gain

anything by appealing to father. Some day, perhaps, he may come back to his senses; but not yet. I verily believe she has bewitched him."

"Many a man has been similarly bewitched by the sorcery of a woman's charms, and your father is just at the age when such spells are the most powerful. Have you had any luncheon?"

"No; I did not want any; it would have choked me to eat an hour ago; besides, I was expressly desired to keep my room till evening; then, I suppose, I am to go down for judgment."

"You were not expressly desired to starve yourself, I imagine! I shall send you up some food; you will be sick if you take nothing till dinner."

"I should like some tea and toast; I could not manage anything else."

"I'll tell your maid Jane to bring you some. Whatever you do, don't fast; you'll want all your forces presently, and Maud has recruited her energies with abundance of good meat and drink. Nobody can behave themselves on an empty stomach. After all, I think you'll not go before Wednesday. Take heart, little girl, and make up your mind to be happy at school."

"I was always quite happy at school, except for the separation from darling mother. Now—I hope it is not naughty to say it, to feel it!—but I shall leave home without regret, nay, with positive satisfaction. Father does not want me any longer; Maud is all the world to him. Oh, Laura, what a wonderful gift beauty is!"

"'Thru for ye, mavourneen,' as our Biddy says; I believe you, my child! And don't I just wish I had it, that's all! But, Anne, it is not only beauty that Maud possesses; it is—well, I don't know *what*! I've often pondered what it is, and never could decide exactly. It's a kind of witchery—a sort of *glamourie* there is about her. She'll make a man believe that black is white while she smiles that sweet, luring, dazzling smile of hers. She lives to be admired, to be adored; most men succumb to her charms, and she—she cares not one jot for any of them; never did—never will! She has no more heart than a statue. When Mother Nature fashioned her, she

gave her all outward grace and beauty, brilliant intellect, and keen perceptions ; she simply omitted what are commonly called the *affections*. She has immense brain-power, but no heart—no, my dear Anne, not a bit of one."

"But don't you think she loves father ? "

"No ; not as much as the cat loves the hearth-rug—certainly not more. You look incredulous."

"Then what did she marry him for ? "

"You unsophisticated girl ! She married him because he was rich and she was poor—miserably poor she was. Mr. Russell left her only some house-rents ; I don't know what they came to, but right little, certainly. And his son, who was, of course, his heir, allowed her something. If she had not feathered her nest while Cousin Jacob lived, I don't know what she would have done—especially when she couldn't get her rents, and her tenants were not nicely-behaved in that respect."

"Did she care for Mr. Russell ? "

"Most assuredly not ; though she made ever such a fuss with him. Maud cares for no one—never did care for any one—but her own sweet self ; and she loves herself to idolatry ! And then she was born without a conscience, as well as without a heart ! Now, that's the truth, Anne, and your wisest plan will be to oppose her no more than you possibly can help. Situated as you are, you will get the worst of it in every way ; you don't know of what she is capable ! That sounds uncharitable—spiteful, you will say—may be so ; but it's the truth, and I speak it to you because I like you, and I am sorry for you. Now, if your father had married me, I would have been good to you, and I should have loved him for the good things he gave me, if not for himself. I was very fond of somebody once—ages ago, when I was not much older than you are now ; but we could not marry on twopence-halfpenny a-year, and so—and so—it all came to nothing ; he went to Canada, and—married ! And I have never since seen the man that could make my heart beat ; though I would have achieved a good match had I been able. If I had had half Maud's beauty and witchery, I would have secured a *bon parti*, and I would have been a good wife to him."

A quarter-of-an-hour afterwards, Jane appeared with a large cup of tea, a round of delicious toast, a boiled egg, and some delicate sandwiches. The girl would fain have condoled, but Anne wisely kept her troubles to herself. She ate, and was refreshed, and went on diligently with her packing ; then she dressed for dinner, though she felt little inclination to go down. Still, it would not do to seem sullen, and she must not on any account omit seeing her father. Miss Gresley had gone home ; but for Anne, the master and mistress of Ivyside must have dined *à deux*. Mr. Wreford, who had that day made several capital bargains, was in high good-humour, and was graciously pleased to approve of the *menu* provided. Mrs. Wreford was tired ; her temper and her kettledrum had been a little too much for her. Anne looked pale, almost to exhaustion.

"Well, you neither of you seem very jolly," said Robert, when the fish and soup had been carried away, and he was enjoying a slice of guinea-fowl. "By the way, Anne, have you settled about your journey ? When does Madame expect you ?"

There was a moment's silence, and then Anne said, tremulously, "I go to-morrow, I believe."

"To-morrow ! Nonsense, *you can't* ! You seem to be in a fine hurry to get away from us all. Not too complimentary, I must say ! Won't next week do ?"

Anne looked at her step-mother, who said coldly, "If there be any urgent reason why you should delay your journey, of course you need not go to-morrow. It must be as your papa wishes."

"It is not only what I wish, but what is fittest. That little ward of Philip Rutland's is going to Madame de la Tour's, and he called in to-day, to know if the child could not travel with Anne. He meant to take her, but important business engagements render his absence just now, and for the next few weeks, most inexpedient. Of course, a few days more or less cannot matter to you ? If Madame expects you this week, just drop a line to tell her you do not leave England till Thursday or Friday, perhaps."

"She could not get a letter to-morrow. The foreign post is already gone out."

"I'll telegraph! What could induce you to settle for to-morrow?"

Here Mrs. Wreford interposed: "My, love, it was *my* doing! Anne's behaviour is such that I am not anxious to have her with me a day longer than can be helped. Both for my comfort, and for her own good, it is essential that she return immediately to the school-girl life which she ought never to have relinquished."

"What is this?" said Robert, regarding his daughter with stern displeasure. "Have you been displaying your tempers again? If you were not leaving home, I should have something to say to you. As it is, I forbear, trusting that absence and the discipline of school may work a thorough reformation in your character, and teach you the necessity of self-control."

Anne made no reply; what could she say? No explanation that she could offer would be admitted; there would only be altercation and bitter recrimination as the result. In every point of view, it was better to refrain from speech—though how difficult this was, when Maud proceeded to state some of her grievances, no one but herself could know. She was right glad when dinner was over, and she could once more retire to her own room, which now seemed to her something between a prison and a sanctuary.

But she concluded that her journey was postponed, as indeed it was. Mrs. Wreford, cautioned by Laura, and remembering those bills of which she had spoken, had tact enough not to venture upon any *imbroglio* for the present; therefore she meekly and sweetly referred the whole affair to her husband, and in a plaintive tone assured him that she made all possible allowances for poor Anne, who was possessed of a most unfortunate disposition, and she would willingly keep her at home, if she could cherish any far-off hope of happiness for either; but it really seemed best and *kindest* to let her go. And then Maud shed a few tears; she was so foolishly disappointed, she said; she had looked forward so confidently to gaining dear Anne's affection, and winning her confidence; she must confess she was bitterly disappointed! And, of course, Robert did all he could to soothe and cheer her, promising solemnly that his daughter, with whom he

was more than ever disgusted, should never be a stumbling block between them, should never be permitted, either directly or indirectly, to mar the happiness of their married life—a happiness more complete, more full, than any he had ever yet imagined as even remotely possible!

So Anne took her reprieve, and was thankful. She saw little of her step-mother ; she had plenty to do with her arrangements ; and she managed to see nearly all the friends of whom she desired personally to take leave. Some of her treasures she left in the care of Maria Meredith ; Mrs. Stanbury and Mrs. Markham promised to correspond with her ; she had a long talk with Philip, and accepted the charge of little Flora Emra, the child of a friend of his, lately deceased, and now left orphaned by the death of her broken-hearted mother. "She is a dear little thing," said Philip ; "tender-hearted, and so grateful for kindness ! As I have no home of my own for her, and aunt does not care to undertake the bringing-up of another little girl, I thought I could not do better than send her to Madame de la Tour, in whom I have every confidence, more especially as Nellie will be at school for some months longer, and you will probably remain for some time. Remember ! she is to be your child ; Nellie is not particularly fond of children."

"It will be a great comfort to have some one to love," said Anne, with a pitiful smile ; "and my great friend, Marguerite, has left, you know. Yes ; I will try to be very good and gentle to little Flora. A school-mother can do a great deal for a little one in such an establishment as Madame de la Tour's."

The days of reprieve passed very rapidly. Thursday was fixed upon for the journey ; Mrs. Markham would go down to Dover with them, and see them safely on board the Calais boat and in charge of the captain, who would start them for Paris. On Wednesday night Robert went to his daughter's room.

"Are you quite ready for the morning, Anne ?" he said.

"Quite ready, papa ; the luggage had best be carried down to-night."

As she stood before him, so tall and womanly, he

suddenly comprehended that Anne had quite ceased to be a child. He placed a pocket-book in her hand. "Take care of that," he continued; "it contains ample funds for the journey and for all your own private expenses for some months; I do not wish you to be stinted in anything. Dress well and subscribe liberally to the English charities; take a generous share in all the expeditions and proper amusements of your schoolfellows. If you have any chance of going to the opera, you have my permission to take advantage of the opportunity."

"Thank you, father; you are very good. Pray believe that I am grateful."

"Show your gratitude, then, by cultivating a better spirit, by overcoming your unaccountable prejudice against your mamma."

"Father," and Anne looked straight into his eyes, "mamma will not let me care for her. But I will not, I do not, speak disrespectfully of her."

"I should hope not; you would incur my deepest displeasure if you did. How you can resist one so sweet, so good, so unutterably charming, is more than I can fathom. I fancied you would be superior to the vulgar prejudice against step-mothers."

"And I do believe I am. Of course you had a right to marry again; and—I must say it, papa—if it had been *any one else*, I think I could have taken to her, though she never could have been to me what darling mother was—and is. Oh, father, you don't know what my mother was to me—how I loved her, how I worship her memory, now that she is a saint in heaven."

"Anne, my dear, your mother was a dear good soul, and I doubt not she is now with the angels of God; but—don't be vexed, dear, I am speaking to you as if you were not my daughter—she and I were not exactly suited; and—and—I know it now, though I never guessed it before—I *never loved her!* I never knew what true love was till I won my precious Maud. We are, indeed, *one*, as I trust you may be some day, my girl, with some congenial spirit."

Then Anne stood upright, "severe in youthful majesty," and spoke fearlessly: "Father, I wonder you *dare* to

stand there and tell me, your only child, my mother's child, that you never loved *her*. It cannot be true."

"It is true. You will understand in the years to come."

"And, father, *so will you*. Something tells me the day will come when you will deeply regret the step you have taken—when you will yearn for the old, true, pure love that is gone for ever. Then perhaps you will turn to me, not for my own sake, but because I am your once-loved Catherine's daughter."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

PHILIP'S CONFIDENCE.

We skip over two years and a-half of Anne Wreford's history. We leave her bidding farewell to Ivyside in order to resume once more the school-life so abruptly suspended some months before; we find her a young woman of eighteen, on a visit to some friends of Madame's at Fontainebleau, and wondering how long she is to remain a pupil, and what her future life, as a grown-up young lady, is to be.

During all this time Anne had not revisited her native country. She had seen her father once, and Philip Rutland several times; her step-mother not at all, though twice she had spent a day or two in Paris. She had been very happy with Madame, who treated her with the utmost kindness and confidence, and allowed her to enjoy a liberty granted only to the English and American pupils—a liberty which the French demoiselles envied, and in vain desired from their austere preceptress, who, to the daughters of the soil, was an uncompromising Lady Abbess. At first, after the freedom of home life, school discipline had been rather irksome to Anne Wreford; but she had the good sense to submit cheer-

fully to all restraints and to obey the stringent rules, which seemed so unnecessary in many particulars. And Madame grew really attached to her English *élève*, and made of her a friend and companion, as the months passed on, and Mr. Wreford's cheques regularly arrived without anything being said of the young lady's withdrawal from her charge.

But at the commencement of that New Year Madame had written to *M. Vreford* a private letter—she had been desired to address all such communications to Fenchurch Street—wherein she required to know upon what footing Mademoiselle, his daughter, was to continue in her establishment. Madame considered that it was quite time she should be released from the ordinary restraints of school-girl discipline. She proposed, therefore, that Anne should become *grande pensionnaire*, which answers, in many respects, to the parlour-boarder of English seminaries. Mademoiselle was still to study, to take lessons from as many professors as should appear desirable; but she was to spend her evenings with Madame, go out with her on occasion, visit with her in the vacations, and enjoy the privilege of a bedroom to herself.

To these proposals Mr. Wreford immediately and without reserve acceded. He would be much obliged if Madame de la Tour would introduce his daughter to her own circle of friends, and he would be delighted to meet all the extra expense which must naturally be incurred. Nothing would please him better than the arrangement so kindly and considerately propounded by Madame de la Tour. He hoped and believed it would be satisfactory to both ladies. From that period, then, Anne virtually ceased to be a regular pupil. She had her separate room, which she partly furnished after her own taste, and where she kept up her own wood fire, and which, also, she shared with little Flora Emra, from whom she refused, on any terms, to be separated. She spent her evenings with Madame in the *grand salon*, or went out with her to parties or to places of entertainment. She was supposed to be entirely exempt from the supervision of all the under governesses, and allowed to study as suited her own convenience. And Anne was perfectly content with her life,

and rather dreaded the changes which must inevitably take place.

Quietly uneventful had been her existence ever since she returned to the shelter of Madame's roof; but a good deal which requires to be mentioned had taken place at home. Anne was no longer her father's only child. Mand had presented him with two fine boys, so that now it was useless and ridiculous to think of making a son of her. Robert was immensely proud of his son and heir, and scarcely less so of his brother, who, however, was reported to be an exceedingly delicate infant; both children were extremely liable to croup. Ivyside was not now the Wrefords' residence; before Mrs. Wreford had been one year a wife, she had so wrought upon her husband that he had consented to that which had hitherto seemed an impossibility—had actually taken a house at the West End, in that most desirable neighbourhood known as Hyde Park Gardens. Mrs. Wreford had professed herself, before her marriage, to be strongly attached to "dear old Hackney;" but then, as she said, the district had deteriorated, which was true enough. Venerable family mansions were pulled down, and rows of new houses and mushroom terraces and villas had sprung up on the site of homely hearth and velvet lawn and spreading cedar. Hackney was no longer, Mrs. Wreford averred, a fitting place of residence for persons in *their* position! All her own friends lived at the West End, and they laughed at her "eccentricity" in preferring "the unknown regions of the east," and one of her acquaintances asked her if Shoreditch and Hackney were not close together! After that, Mrs. Wreford made up her mind that she would turn her face from Hackney as speedily as possible, and then she found out that it did not suit her health, that she had never been altogether well since she took up her abode at Ivyside, that duty called upon her to migrate, without further hesitation or delay, towards the regions of Belgravia, Kensington, or Tyburnia, as choice or convenience might dictate. And finally it came to pass that Robert, after some scruples and some regrets, which, however, he did not express, yielded to the representations and importunities of his better-half, and soon succeeded in securing a long lease of one of those

“eligible family mansions” which are seldom in the market. His wife tried to persuade him that he had it quite a bargain, but Robert pulled a long face, and grumbled a little about the increased expense.

Nevertheless, the removal was accomplished, and Maud Wreford congratulated herself on having so quickly obtained her purpose. It was in the new house that the second boy, little Frederic, was born.

As I said before, Anne was now eighteen, and she spent her birthday at Fontainebleau, with the Blévilles, who were old and valued friends of Madame de la Tour's, and whose daughters she had educated. Méranie, the youngest of these girls, was about Anne's age, and had been her chief *intime* in the school after Marguerite's departure. It was splendid summer weather, and quite a relief to get away from the burning asphalte pavements of Paris to the shady greenwood aisles; for the Chateau Bléville was almost on the skirts of the venerable forest. Anne had heard nothing from England for some weeks, but she had received money for her visit, and just one line from her father, telling her where she could most easily cash her cheque. She was not anxious, however, and she had come into the country fully prepared to enjoy her holiday. Flora, too, was with her, the guest of Mdme. Bléville's little grandchildren, who were spending a month at the Château. There had been some talk of Flora's going with the German governess to the sea-baths at Boulogne, but the child had prayed to stay with her *chère petite maman*, Mademoiselle Vréford—to go with her wherever she should go. The little girl was now in her tenth year, and so thoroughly French in her ways and manners that Anne thought very seriously of writing to Philip—or perhaps to Mrs. Markham; she had never written to Philip, though she had sent messages to him through his aunt and sisters—to say that it was quite time Flora should learn a little English, if she were not to grow up a Frenchwoman in all but birth. Agnes Rutland and her next sister were both married, and pretty, mischievous little Nellie was engaged. Philip, to the infinite regret of his female relatives, seemed determined to remain a bachelor; even Mr. Rutland, senior, thought it his duty to say a word of

remonstrance to his son, who was now almost thirty years of age.

But Philip only laughed, and declared that he would marry all in good time; he could not and he would not be hurried; he would wait till he found the woman who exactly suited him. To his aunt he spoke more candidly: "Don't be vexed with me, auntie; I really cannot like any of the girls I meet. Not but what they are nice enough girls in themselves, but they are not to my taste."

"Philip! it is not possible that you are keeping single for the sake of that silly Julia Essleton?"

"For her sake! a thousand times no! The heartless little jilt! Not but what I am most devoutly thankful she did jilt me, though I wore the willow at the time, you know. Dear me, auntie, how many years ago is it since that little episode in my history transpired? Why, it must be ten years since first I fell a victim to Julia's fascinations. I was but a lad, and I suppose it was only calf-love! I don't know, though; it went deeper than anybody knew, for when she threw me over for Essleton, I made moan enough in my own heart, though I kept my trouble to myself."

"I knew how sorely you were wounded, my boy. I was terribly afraid lest Julia's unworthy conduct should have a very bad effect upon you. Nothing is worse for a young man than to have his confidence in woman shaken—to have his opinion of the sex lowered. For years, as you know, I never ventured to mention her name. Once I remember speaking to you about my own poor boy and his unfortunate entanglement and subsequent wretchedness, and I thought you coloured and looked uneasy."

"I dare say I did, thinking of my own folly, which, luckily for me, very few people knew anything about. But I have not only got over it—long ago—but I know now that it was *not* the real thing; that I might have been as miserable as poor Arthur if that engagement had not terminated as it did. Still, the affair had so much weight that I lost all idea of marrying early, according to my first intent. I determined to remain heart free. I am afraid I flirted, for I must own to liking the society of

pretty girls ; but you warned me against being a detrimental, you know, and I hope I never stood in anybody's way."

"That is all very well, Philip ; but I do wish now you would make haste and stumble upon the charming creature who is doubtless waiting for you somewhere. I must say you are very difficult to please. I am glad your sisters were not so ultra-fastidious."

"Aunt, can you keep a secret ? "

"To be sure I can ! Did I ever say a word about that detestable Julia ? What is it ? "

"What a true woman you are, auntie ! The bare mention of a secret puts you on your mettle, and makes your eyes sparkle through your spectacles. Well, I have a confidence to make to you—to *you alone*, remember ! "

"Certainly. Confidences should never be shared. I begin to suspect, Philip, you *have* seen the lady who is to be your wife."

"I begin to suspect it myself."

"You only suspect it ? Is it a mere fancy, then ? "

"It is no fancy ; but it behoves a man in his thirtieth year to do nothing rashly ; and I want a little advice."

"Of course, my dear boy ; sit down and tell me all about it." And good Mrs. Markham settled herself in her own particular chair, and laid down her knitting that she might have all her faculties concentrated on what she was about to hear. "Now, first of all, Philip, tell me one thing—is she an Englishwoman ? "

"An Englishwoman born of English parents, and within four miles of Charing Cross."

"Have I ever seen her ? "

"Many times ; and she is one of your especial favourites. I wonder you never tried to make a match of it, considering your little weaknesses in that direction, auntie dear."

"My dear, I never wished to make a match for anybody. I should be too much afraid of the responsibility ; but don't keep me in suspense—who is the young lady ? "

"What do you think of Anne Wreford ? "

"Anne Wreford ? You are joking, my dear Philip."

"Not a bit of it; I am in sober earnest. Why should you think otherwise?"

"Because Anne Wreford is a child—a very dear, good child, I know, but still a mere school-girl."

"She was a child, perhaps, when you last saw her; she is a woman now—much more of a woman than our Nellie, who is already a betrothed wife, though Nellie is actually two years older than Anne."

"Then Anne is eighteen; I should scarcely have thought it. But, my dear Philip, *thirty* and eighteen!"

"Nine-and-twenty, if you please, auntie; I still want some months of thirty. Well, twenty-nine *or* thirty, the difference is on the right side, and though Anne has only been eighteen years in this world, she has depth of character and more mind than many a woman of twenty-five. Is her youth your only objection?"

"I don't know; I must think. I remember that I always respected Anne Wreford, and that is something. As for her mother, I loved her with all my heart; a sweeter woman never lived than Robert Wreford's first wife. I am glad Anne was *her* daughter. Have you said anything to Mr. Wreford?"

"No, and I do not know that I shall, at present; I am going to Fontainebleau next week, to see my ward, who is there on a visit with Anne. Then I shall see my girl, and make up my mind; if she is what I feel sure she must be by this time, it will not be a difficult or a lengthy process."

"Well, you know all about her—that is a great point—and she always liked you, though I am as sure as I can be of anything that she never thought of you in the light of a lover."

"All the better for me. I do not approve of your precocious little chits, who discuss possible suitors before they are out of short frocks. It will be just what I prefer, gently turning her liking into loving. Now, aunt, you have my secret, don't let the smallest dribble leak out; for, remember, it may all end in nothing."

"Your secret is safe enough with me—safer than gold in the cellars of the Bank of England. How long, if I may ask, have you been thinking of Anne Wreford?"

"How long? That is more than I can tell you. Ever since we crossed together from Newhaven to Dieppe—getting on now for six years ago, I fancy."

"You don't mean to say you fell in love with a child?"

"I didn't fall in love in the least. But I fancied the girl—though at first sight I took her for a mere cry-baby; she was so sensible, so companionable, so altogether *nice*, that I began to wonder what sort of a woman her mother was, and to wish to see her. And when I did see her, I no longer wondered at her daughter's superiority; I always cherished a sort of filial affection for our dear Mrs. Wreford. I think—I am not sure—but I think I really began to regard Anne in the light of a possible wife when I fetched her home from school to her mother's dying bed."

"Philip, I think you will marry Anne Wreford, if you can win her. But I have heard her say she would never marry."

"That is nothing—a mere childish resolve which, I dare say, she has forgotten by this time. I am only afraid she looks upon me as quite a middle-aged man, and will be amazed, perhaps frightened, if I present myself too hastily in my new character."

"You must not be abrupt. You must accustom her to think of you as a possible lover before you actually propose. When do you go?"

"I shall start on Monday evening, transact a little business in Paris, and, if possible, reach Fontainebleau on Thursday morning, which is her birthday. I shall take her a present, of course. She is old enough now to wear jewels."

"And I, too, will send her some little remembrance, which you can present from me. That will help to smooth the way a little."

"Thank you, auntie; you are very kind. I know I have your best wishes."

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN HOUR IN PERE LA CHAISE.

AND on the appointed Monday evening Philip set out on his journey, carrying with him his own and his aunt's birthday-presents. Mrs. Markham chose for Anne a handsome but plain gold brooch, as suitable for a girl not yet "introduced;" Philip himself had no end of difficulty in making his selection, and he must have sorely tried the patience of the obliging jeweller whom on this occasion he patronised. "Why not get what you want in Paris?" Mrs. Markham had suggested; and Philip had replied, "No! she will like it all the better for being English; I am sure she must be almost tired of life in France; but what shall it be? I greatly admire this locket and necklace."

"It is too costly, unless, indeed, it is presented to your betrothed! One does not give an unmarried girl diamonds such as these."

"I suppose you are right, and of course, I wish to present *it*—whatever it may be—on the morning of the 14th. What do you say to this turquoise bracelet?"

"It is lovely; but not suitable for Anne—she is quite too dark for turquoises. Here is a beautiful emerald pendant, or is it a locket? Yes, and a necklace to match."

"I will not give her emeralds! No, I am not superstitious; but I once gave Julia Essleton an emerald ring, which I dare say she still wears, as it happens to be a valuable one. I have detested emeralds ever since that little jilt disenchanted me of my youthful fancies. Now, look at this locket, dead-gold, with just one brilliant in the centre! There is no canon of society against a girl wearing just one diamond, surely? And I don't care if there is, for I have made up my mind, and I shall buy it for Anne. So here goes, auntie, and it's of no use your protesting."

"I am not thinking of protesting; nothing can be

better than your choice"—and as Philip began to inspect a tray of rings—"I would not think of a ring if I were you, as you cannot possibly tell the right size."

"But I shall want an engagement ring if she accepts me. No girl now thinks herself engaged any more than married without a ring."

"Philip, did you never read the Vision of Alnaschar, or the fable of the girl who counted her chickens before they were hatched!—before even the eggs were laid, if I remember rightly?"

"Well, yes; I must confess to having made myself acquainted with both those pieces of literature, and to have taken to heart the moral they are supposed to teach. But still, one should be ready for future possibilities; and if I propose to Anne, and if I am accepted, I shall certainly require an engagement ring; I can guess the size, and it can easily be altered if it do not quite fit."

"Very well, Philip Rutland, please yourself; but if I were you I would be pretty sure of the girl before I purchased the ring. You will not like to keep it by you for an indefinite time—an over-hasty investment."

"Aunt, I declare you croak like any raven! You seem to infer that I am going on a fool's errand."

"Not at all, my dear! I quite approve of your errand; I am only afraid lest you should spoil your chance by a premature declaration. Make love to the girl discreetly, let her be accustomed gradually to your new character; do not on this occasion give her opportunity of saying 'No.' Leave her free, but *impressed*; give her to understand that you no longer regard her as your child-friend, that she is something more to you than she has ever been; but do not at present commit yourself."

"You do not think I shall repeat?"

"By no means; a sensible, sober-minded man of your age generally knows his own mind, especially when he has had former experiences of a certain complexion, which have taught him to discriminate between gold and tinsel. But, depend upon it, if you are too hasty you will defeat yourself. A girl like Anne Wreford will not marry a man just because he asks her."

"I should hope not; I should shun—I *have* shunned

several such girls. But Anne has always liked me—always has been *fond* of me, as people say, ever since we became fast friends at Rouen, when her father was such a bear to her."

"And because she has been so fond of you as to show her fondness, all the more should you be cautious how you startle her into maiden-shamefastness and precision. She will no more expect a proposal from you than from your father."

"We shall see—we shall see. Oh, auntie, you are a very clever woman, but you never went a-wooing. I like my roses with the early dew upon them; I prefer to gather my peach with its bloom untouched; I want to be my wife's first and only love. And, further still, I have determined within myself these three years past that Anne Wreford shall be my love and my wife."

This conversation took place between Mrs. Markham and her nephew as they drove home in the brougham on the Friday afternoon, and it was renewed more than once during the Saturday and Sunday, and always with the same result. On Monday Philip said good-bye to Bayswater, for at least a week. He meant to take his aunt's advice so far as not to make his declaration till he had been several days at Fontainebleau. He did not tell the good lady that he had returned on Saturday to the jewelers in Bond Street, and bought the identical sapphire and diamond ring which had taken his fancy the day before; but there it was, on its white velvet cushion, safe in his waistcoat pocket, when the tidal train, and he with it, sped through the lovely summer night on its way to Folkestone.

Wednesday morning found him concluding his business at Paris, and impatient to pursue his journey. He scarcely knew what to do with himself during the hours which must intervene before his departure for Fontainebleau. He was going thither by a late train, and now it was only two o'clock, and the Rue Rivoli was as hot as if a simoon were blowing from the Seine. He had made a substantial breakfast, so substantial that there could be no excuse for a cup of *café noir*, or even a lemon-ice, though the marble tables, overshadowed by myrtles and

orange-trees, looked invitingly cool and restful. He walked on, without any idea whither he was going, till he found himself in the Rue St. Antoine, and approaching the Place de la Bastille; and then he began to consider his steps. "What in the world made me come out here?" he asked himself, as the tall Colonne de Juillet rose against the cloudless sky. "I am out of the way of everything; I fancy I had some idea of taking a look at the old city once more. I should have crossed by the Pont Notre Dame, of course; it is not too late now to turn back and take the Pont Marie, and then the Pont Philippe, and then I am close to the tower of Quasimodo. I can sit undisturbed in the great cool cathedral, nor will there be much sunshine in those high, narrow streets. Pah! but the filthy smells! I remember the last time I visited the ancient Lutetia in hot weather I was almost poisoned; it was worse than the Seven Dials in the dog days! No! I won't go there and catch the cholera. Why didn't I walk into the Louvre, I wonder, or into the Palais Royal, or anywhere to get off this weary asphalte, that actually scorches my poor toes? I know what I will do—I'll make a pilgrimage to Père la Chaise. Let me see! If I don't mistake, there is a short cut by the Rue de la Roquette—at least, there used to be. I'll find a shady grotto somewhere, for this blaze is growing intolerable."

The street to which Mr. Rutland referred was exactly opposite him as he stood, and in a very short time he had reached the world-renowned cemetery, and entered within its gates. He did find the nook he sought—a shady, rocky corner, with a spring bubbling in its midst, and a thicket of ferns around it. There was a comfortable seat, which he was glad enough to secure; the high bank, crowned with trees behind, sheltered him entirely from the sun; the temperature in this pleasant green retreat was positively delightful. Philip began to think once more of the Château Bléville, and to wonder how Anne would look, and what she would say, and what he would say to her, and so, wondering and meditating, he fell asleep, tired with his long, hot walk, and lulled by the murmur of the fountain.

He had slept, perhaps, half-an-hour, when he was awakened by a touch; a hand was upon him, and, as it seemed to him, in very close proximity to his gold albert. In a moment he censured himself for falling asleep in such a place, without at least buttoning his coat; he was instantly on the alert, sitting bolt upright, and looking about him in true English defiant fashion. His watch and chain were safe, and so was his pocket-book; but there, straight before him, at little more than a yard's distance, stood a man, tall, loose-limbed, unshaven, dirty, and unkempt; a most unprepossessing and suspicious-looking individual; what the French would call a very decided *mauvais sujet*. It suddenly flashed upon Philip Rutland that persons of this class were occasionally to be met with in the cemetery, and he at once looked at the intruder as if to measure his strength. "Plenty of him, but weedy; altogether in bad form," was the young man's verdict, "and not a day under fifty. If he shows fight, I'll tackle him with all the pleasure imaginable. He's no Frenchman. I am afraid he is my own compatriot."

These thoughts ran through Philip's brain far more quickly than I have written them; in fact, scarcely half a minute elapsed from the second when he was first conscious of the presence of this *mauvais sujet*, till the personage accosted him, in the drawling, nasal tone commonly attributed to Americans—"Wal, stranger, you're right comfortable, I guess! It's pretty considerable hot, ain't it? Never was so parched in my life before; wish I'd a cobbler of some sort convenient. Shouldn't mind a drop o' corn-drink, either. Guess ye're from the old country, stranger?"

"Guess I am," replied Philip, coldly; "but I don't see that it is any business of yours."

"You Britishers is so cussed stuck-up! Now I like a turn at the gab with every gentleman I meet. You seemed to be dreaming like when I come up."

"I was. I dreamt that I felt a hand upon this chain—just so, you understand."

"Queer things dreams are. What is it Byron says?—'I had a dream which was not all a dream.' Then Shakespeare—

“ ‘We are such stuff
As dreams are made on ; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.’

Hamlet, too, had something to say about dreams, had he not ? Something very serious, if my memory serve me:—

“ ‘To sleep—perchance to dream ; ay, there’s the rub ;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil.’

And, of course, when I say *Hamlet*, I mean the immortal bard himself. What is your opinion of *Hamlet*, if I may take the liberty of inquiring ? Was he mad, or was he not ? Was he a profound reality, or was he the creation of a poet’s brain—a masterpiece of a creation, as, of course, all critics must concede ; but still, a creation of the fancy—nothing more. He is—the Prince of Denmark, I mean—a strange commixture of irresolution and philosophy ; perpetually he is on the verge of action, and perpetually he falls back, hesitating, vacillating, till all is lost. As Coleridge puts it :—‘We see in him a great and almost intellectual activity, and a consequent aversion to real action.’ That is my own case, stranger!—the reflective power in myself predominates unduly over the active power ; hence, a climax of failures and misfortunes ! *Air you listening, sir ?*”

“ I am listening, certainly,” replied Philip, interested in spite of himself, yet still completely on his guard ; “ but I think it is quite too hot for metaphysics, nor do I feel at all inclined to enter upon so difficult a problem as the character of *Hamlet*, or to determine what by him the great dramatist intended to portray. I am thinking, rather, of yourself. You addressed me in the tone and style of an American ; then you spoke like an educated Englishman, save in the final sentence. Since you took the trouble to inquire into my nationality, may I return the compliment, and ask, are not *you* from the ‘Old Country’ ? ”

“ Sir, I am from England ; and, ‘with all its faults, I love it still !’ The man of Olney used the *second* person, I believe ; I, not being for the moment in an apostrophising mood, must take the *third*. Like Mrs. Malaprop, I am very particular about my parts of speech, and I pride

myself on the accuracy of my quotations. Yes, I am English-born and English-bred. Oxford was my *alma mater*; but my ungrateful country thrust me forth to starve. England's want of appreciation of true genius is proverbial as her wretched climate. She does not, like the Hebrews of old, actually slay her prophets; she simply lets them die of inanition. She relegates them to work-houses, police-stations, lunatic asylums! but she builds their sepulchres,—yes, sir! when the times are rife, she builds their sepulchres! Nevertheless, I cry with the bard of Avon—

“‘This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this ENGLAND!’

And with Dibdin I sing—

“‘O, it’s a snug little island!
A right little, tight little island!’

England, then, is my mother country; the States my step-mother, and not a bad one, either. I have, as a whole, prospered far more under the Stars and Stripes than under the Union Jack. You took me for a Yankee then, did you?”

“When you first spoke, I did; though, at the first glance, I imagined you to be English, or, perhaps, Irish!”

“Faix, thin! an’ it’s not a Paddy that I am, though a Paddy I’ve bin, when it servèd mee turn. Shure, an’ it’s a cosmopolitan that I am, yer honor.” And the fellow spoke with a racy, Irish accent, and slouched his hat, and winked his eye good-naturedly, in genuine Paddy fashion. And then, before Philip could express his surprise, he was saluted in purest Parisian French, and complimented on his appearance in good, sound German; after which followed a classical quotation in faultless Latin. The man had clearly had the education of a gentleman, and yet he presented the appearance of a vagabond—as downright a vagabond as ever walked the earth! *Scamp* was written on every feature, and, in spite of his evident culture, in every gesture. The very cut and sit of his seedy habiliments were those of a rascally “*ne’er do weel.*”

"Are you making any stay in Paris, sir?" he next asked, in plain English.

"I am not; I leave Paris in a few hours," Philip was not sorry to reply. It suddenly struck him that this disreputable individual might haunt him, and persist in becoming a sort of hanger-on, unless he gave him up to the police.

"Because," continued the *mauvais sujet*, "if monsieur were remaining only for this evening, I might, perhaps, have hoped for the honour of his patronage and presence at my little entertainment in the Quartier Latin?"

"What entertainment?"

"A novel one, such as monsieur has probably never witnessed. I myself am the originator of these entertainments, which are both instructive and amusing. When I am in England or America I call them 'Facial Representations.' In Paris and its environs they are advertised as 'Les Nouvelles Tableaux Vivants.' They are, indeed, extremely diverting and instructive—yes, in a certain sense, *instructive!*"

"In what way do they instruct?"

"They exhibit the command which it is possible to obtain over the facial muscles; furthermore, they are veritable exemplifications of 'the passions and emotions of the mind,' as my ancient foe and friend, Lindley Murray, expresses it. Look!"

Immediately the man's *nonchalant* manner changed into one of eager expectation. He drew himself up to his full height; he nervously intertwined his fingers; his eyes were lighted up with a strange fire; every feature quivered. He seemed to be waiting, in an agony of suspense, for fateful tidings. Suddenly the lines of the face relaxed, the hands fell listlessly, the far-off gaze came home—the man was expecting nothing. "That," he said, "was the delineation of '*Intense Expectation.*' Now I will show you '*Scorn!*'"

It was done to the life; and ere Philip could express an opinion, he was treated to the aspect of "*Hopeless Sorrow.*" The man flung himself on the turf, and, supporting his chin with his hands, assumed an expression of dull, despairing misery, that for the moment touched

the heart of the bystander. It was so intensely real in its effect that Philip forgot that it was only acting, and a sudden dread seized him lest the hapless creature grovelling at his feet should find himself that night on the loneliest of the Seine bridges, where the river was deepest and the current strongest. In a moment the *artist* had started up, and was flinging his shabby hat into the air, while mad delight, rapturous, overpowering joy, shone out from every lineament, and filled the beholder with an astonishment akin to awe. It was certainly a very remarkable performance.

“Well, sir, what do you think of my entertainment?” said the man, when he had settled down again into the ordinary rôle of an unprincipled adventurer and citizen of the world.

“I think it is very remarkable, and to a certain extent clever! Do you, then, get your living by these representations?”

“I am sorry to confess that I do. I am aware that my profession is not exactly genteel!—that is to say, not as *gentlemanly* as could be desired for a person of my true rank and varied genius. *Mais*”—with an emphatic French shrug of the rounded shoulders—“*que voulez-vous?* A man must live, and he must live in his own way, and not in that of others. I have tried various professions. I was once a doctor. I had the ill-luck to poison my most profitable patient! I was also a lawyer; for the merest *bagatelle* of an indiscretion my name would have been struck off the Rolls—only that, through some trivial oversight, it was not there! I have been a lecturer on every subject under the sun. I have been a teacher of theology, a Liverpool sharebroker, a professor of languages and philosopher, a Primitive Methodist preacher, a Jesuit in disguise, a journalist, a *littérateur*—generally! And somehow in all these varied occupations I have failed. I have had my meed of fame! What then? Fame no more provides bed and board than fair words butter parsnips—a vegetable production, by the way, which I abominate. It was necessary to turn a penny—*honestly* if I could, dishonestly if that were the alternative. I can work my present profession in both

ways as seems expedient ; at the same time, assuring you that I prefer keeping to the square when practicable, partly because continuous invention and intrigue are a terrible pull upon the mental and physical resources, and partly because Governments have an illiberal objection to certain transactions which they disapprove. There are the *travaux forcés* in this gay, charming country ; the hulks and oakum-picking in our own favoured isle ; there's 'Sing-Sing' in New York ; and the police are *everywhere*. I dare say they parade the golden streets of the New Jerusalem, and I haven't a doubt but there are plenty of them down below under Inspector Pluto and the stipendiary magistrate Rhadamanthus ! Now, sir, when I thus tell you that I am a poor man, virtuously disposed, but liable to yield to temptation, rather out of health, and of a feeble constitution, being born with a natural tendency to asthma, croup, and kleptomania, I am sure the generosity of your disposition will prompt your feeling heart to contribute a trifle to my little store. My charge for a best reserved seat at my 'Entertainments' is a franc. You have had the advantage of a private *séance—al fresco*, too—which is an undeniable advantage, with the thermometer at 90 deg. in the shade. When I attend private families, I fix the minimum of my *honorarium*, but to my clients themselves I leave the maximum. It is only fair, only doing as you would be done by, to give people opportunities for exercising the noblest Christian principles, and for indulging their chivalric impulses."

"It strikes me, my friend, that you had a sharp attack of one of the hereditary maladies of which you complain just before I dreamt that peculiar dream to which I alluded !"

"Let me consider ! I outgrew *croup* when I was about seven years old, I have heard my sainted mother declare ! *Asthma* I have been free from since I spent a winter in Algeria ; it must then have been *kleptomania* ! I do suffer terribly from that infirmity, at times ; yes, I think I *did* feel a twinge or two—a certain irritation at the tips of my fingers—when I saw you there so sweetly sleeping."

"That is a very genteel way of putting it ; but I am a

plain Englishman, and, like the Macedonians of old, I call a spade a spade ! Let me warn you, sir, that kleptomania is a very dangerous complaint, and necessitates severest treatment ! I thought I was not deceived. If dumb acting be not a genteel calling, thieving is infinitely worse ; it is *rascally* ! What is to prevent my giving a hint to the police before I leave Paris ? It strikes me that you can scarcely be unknown to them."

" I am not afraid of my countryman doing any shabby thing of the sort," said the man, with an humble air. " Sir, you see before you one tossed and shipwrecked on life's tempestuous ocean; the tennis-ball of fortune ; a wretch, to whom the fates have never been propitious ! a miserable sinner, continually repenting and sinning afresh ; a wanderer on the face of the earth ; a second Cain, guilty of the murder of his own moral faculties—another Herod, who has massacred a thousand innocents—that is to say, his own divine and virtuous impulses ! "

" Have you ever been on the stage, sir ? "

" I have ! In the recital of my multifarious occupations—shall I say *vocations* ?—I forgot to mention that I had worn the buskins ; I myself have played Hamlet and Romeo to admiring audiences. Once I was all but cast for Macbeth, but a vulgar-minded, envious, irascible rival stepped in and bore off the laurels that should have been mine ; and on one memorable occasion I brought the house down, at Little Muddleton, with Sir Anthony Absolute—I brought the house down, I do assure you ! And yet tragedy was my forte. I was born for a tragedian ; I should have eclipsed both Edmund Kean and Macready had not my opportunities come inopportunely to an end."

" Perhaps you had an attack of *kleptomania* ? "

" Alas ! you hit the truth ! It was a very bad attack, too ; and my unfeeling comrades drove me from them as if I had been an unclean animal. Never, no, never ! shall I forgive the walking gentleman or the singing-chamber-maid of that company for their cruel taunts—their inhuman persecution. I was warned never to set my feet again on British boards, or worse would follow. I took the hint, I became a *medium*."

“A vocation entirely suited to your tastes and abilities, I should imagine.”

“Sir, you are a gentleman of profound discrimination. *Spiritualism* is my delight. No table ever refused to turn, or to tilt, or to mount into the air, at my command. I know the cabinet trick; the Davenport Brothers privately acknowledged that I surpassed them; in public they denounced me as an impostor. I can ‘call spirits from the vasty deep,’ and when I call they are bound to answer—rap the walls, ring bells in the air, play on accordions under the table, pinch the noses of infidels—in fact, do anything they are desired to do. Somehow, I got tired of being a *medium*, and in America I was mixed up with the celebrated Katie King business; so I gave up Spiritualism as a means of livelihood, and only now revert to it when I see an opening.”

“My poor fellow, do you ever ask yourself what must be the end of such a career? Do you believe there is a God?”

“Of course I do; I am a religious man! Pray don’t suppose I am a *heathen*!”

“It might be better for you if you were a heathen, for then you would not sin against light. As surely as you stand there, there will come a day when you will have to answer for this worse than wasted life of yours—a day when, all too late, you will——”

“‘Too late! too late! ye cannot enter now,’” interposed the incorrigible trifler. “I once heard my wife sing that, I fancy.”

“Your wife! Have you indeed a wife?”

“I had one, and a handsomer lass never wore out shoes, I promise you. But, between ourselves, she was a down-right *diablesse*! I believe she is still living, but I am not sure; and I dare say she supposes I am dead. I have some reason to believe she has married again; I heard of her being seen driving in the Bois with a rich old fellow, whom she had decoyed into matrimony. If that turns out to be true, it will be my turn to make reprisals; my fair and vixenish Matilda will have to sing small, I fancy, when I put in my claim for a share of the old man’s wealth. I don’t know whether I’d have her back again, for she

was as haughty and supercilious as she was beautiful ; but I could play a rare good card if I really found her married to another man, and that man a millionaire ! She is a lady, every inch of her, mind you ; and I was once a gentleman. She was poor, though—very poor—a teacher, or half-boarder, in a cheap ladies' school, and I was befooled with her handsome face and her imperial looks ; and I persuaded her that she had better run away with me ; and she didn't need so much persuasion, for her mistresses were nasty, spiteful cats—as middle-class school-mistresses very often are—and they drove her half crazy with their malice and tyranny, and worked her as if she were their legal bondswoman. So she married me—I was a good-looking fellow in those days—and I invented a little romance about myself that quite won her girlish fancy. I don't say her heart, for she never had one ! Before the honeymoon was well over, she found out that all my estates were aerial, and that she would have to work hard to maintain herself, if she lived at all. I believe she hated me ! As you may conjecture, it was a nice kind of life we led ; we quarrelled morning, noon, and night, and at last we mutually agreed to separate, on account of 'incompatibility of temper.' Before, however, we carried out these mutual intentions, I—disgusted with her selfishness and arrogance—took all that I could call my own, and perhaps a little more, and *absquatulated*, as the Americans say. I have never seen Madame Tillie since, and she may be dead for aught I know ; but if she's played her cards well enough to become the wealthy woman she always swore she would be, I shall be seized with a sudden fit of conjugal devotion, and I shall claim her—that is, if I can find her."

" And I devoutly hope you will not find her ; whatever be the woman's faults of temper, she cannot deserve so cruel a fate as would be hers, restored, or rather forced back upon a husband such as you. And now, I will wish you good morning ; I am tired of this place and of your company."

" But the *honorarium*," he replied, without a spark of indignation, and almost in the whine of a professional beggar. " Surely, monsieur, who is evidently a wealthy

aristocrat, will not forget the unique little entertainment to which I have treated him ? And I have not dined, nor am I likely to dine, alas ! unless some generous hand meets mine. Ah, monsieur, if you had supped last night on stale bread and cresses, and breakfasted this morning on the remains of the bread, and no cresses, you, too, might feel a slight—just a very slight—disposition to kleptomania, which often, I assure you, is caused by an empty stomach, just as rheumatism comes from cold and damp, and diphtheria from foul air."

Half revolted, and yet half pitiful, Philip dropped a five-franc piece into the vagabond's extended palm, and hurried from the place. When he was a good way from the cemetery he looked back, but saw no trace of the man with whom he had just held so singular a conversation. With a feeling of relief he went on at a more sober pace, and turning by a short cut into the Boulevard St. Martin, entered a certain well-known *restaurant*, where he dined, and loitered till it was time to return to the hotel for his valise, thence to proceed to the railway station.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

B E F O R E B R E A K F A S T.

"WHAT a glorious morning!" cried Méranie Bléville, as she danced into Anne's bedroom, which opened from her own, on that especial Thursday which was to witness Philip Rutland's arrival at Château Bléville ; "that dreadful thunderstorm has cleared the air, and washed the dust away, and instead of autumn-russet, the shrubberies, and even the forest, are quite green again, as if it were Mid-summer, instead of the very end of August. It is all for your *jour-de-fête*, mademoiselle."

"Just look here!" was all Anne's rejoinder, as she

pointed to a table at the foot of the bed ; "some good fairy has been here during the night, and brought all these pretty things ! some of them the very things I wanted most."

"How very curious ! A most beneficent—a most discriminating fairy !"

"And in your confidence, it seems !" said Anne, displaying a prettily-embroidered bag, richly lined, and quilted with satin ; "why ! I knew your favourite stitch the moment I caught sight of it, not to mention your favourite scent, a *sachet* of which I find inside. A thousand thanks for your charming present, dear Méranie."

"*Rien du tout*; nothing at all, *cherie* ! Let us look at something else. Ah ! these volumes of *Racine* ! they are from *Madame*, I know, because she let me into the secret ; and that crimson and white *peignoir* is from *maman* ; that coral brooch is papa's *petit cadeau* ; and the topaz pendant is from my brother, *Alexandre*."

"And here is my pet's *souvenir*. See ! a fine cambric *mouchoir*, with a border of Mechlin, and hemmed by her own little fingers ! I did not think she could sew so neatly. This is the mystery, I suppose, which has kept her so busy, and made her so reserved on certain occasions, ever since that spring-day we spent at Vincennes, my pretty, industrious little Flora ! "

"And have you nothing from England ?"

"Nothing ! But then I did not expect anything, and, therefore, I am not disappointed. My father never took note of birthdays ; I feel sure he could not tell exactly when mine came round, and Mrs. Wreford never concerns herself about me. Then I have no especial friends at home."

"I should have thought Nellie Rutland would have written, at least."

"Yes ; Nellie might have written, for she has my name down in her birthday-book. But then she is *fiancée*, you know, and that must make such a difference to a girl. And I fancy Nelly is dreadfully in love. I wonder how it feels ?"

"Have you never cared for anybody ? I thought you English girls always had several *prétendus* on hand. Don't you remember Grace and Sylvia Delmaine ?"

"They were American, not English. And American girls allow themselves a latitude unknown in England. Girls in our country never receive young men on their own account, and are not supposed to issue invitations, or make appointments with them, except by direct permission."

"But she may go anywhere with her *futur*?"

"Yes, anywhere, with perhaps a few reservations. She would not travel alone with him, of course—I mean she would not accompany him to another part of the country, and remain with him, unaccompanied; that would be thought extremely indecorous. But she may go anywhere with him in reason, and he may spend his evenings with her at home, if her parents approve. How should people know each other if they cannot meet freely? And people certainly should know each other before they marry!"

"Ah! that is your English idea; we leave such affairs in the hands of our mothers. They have experience; they understand marriage, and they can judge better than we what sort of man will be suitable; so they choose for us. I know my mother is thinking of M. Léon Coquerel for me, but she says nothing. Some day she will tell me that it is arranged. If I make any demur—which perhaps I shall, for I don't particularly fancy M. Léon—she will tell me that it is quite time I was established, and that she expects obedience, as I have been properly brought up."

"And yet your mother is a good and loving one! I have loved Madame Bléville ever since I knew her; she is so wonderfully kind and considerate. I call her a most indulgent mother."

"And so she is—a very jewel of mothers! I would not change her for any other girl's mother; of that I am very sure. But she will only do her duty, as she esteems it, and as we have been taught to regard it. I am not sure I should like the risk of choosing for myself; my sisters married in this way, and they are both extremely happy. Adèle really worships her husband."

"Ah, well! I would not have a husband, even of my own mother's choosing; and she, had she lived, would have been the last to choose for me."

"In that case you must choose for yourself; you are eighteen to-day. Would you not like to have a home of your own?"

"For many reasons I should, for I am pretty certain I shall never be comfortable with Mrs. Wreford; but I had rather bear any amount of discomfort from her than marry a person I cared little about, for the sake of freedom. It would be liberty dearly bought, and it might be no liberty at all, but a miserable and life-long slavery. However, I am not going to trouble myself about it; I am very happy with Madame de la Tour, and she is trying to arrange an Italian tour for me next year, or at Christmas. Her sister, Madame Maurice, means to visit Italy, and, if my father consents, I shall accompany her. Then I think I should like to spend a few months in Germany. When my education is once supposed to be completed, there may be an end of my chances. I am in no hurry to go back to England."

"But, unless you marry and settle in France, your life cannot be said to begin till you return to your home, and go properly into society, after the fashion of English young ladies."

"And I am in no hurry about my life beginning; my life shall come to me; I will not go out to meet it."

Little did Anne think that her life was coming to her that very day!

The girls dressed, and went out into the beautiful grounds which belonged to the Château. Méranie insisted on superintending her friend's toilet, and she would not let her wear a certain robe, which everybody said did not become her.

"See here," said Méranie, turning over Anne's wardrobe as she spoke, "you shall wear this soft, dark grey thing, which hangs in such graceful folds, with just little ruffles at the neck and at the wrists, and carnation ribbons; and in the evening this black, flounced grenadine, with your best lace and coral ornaments. Now, make haste; we will have a roll and some milk, and go out and gather flowers. I wonder if there are roses enough to make you a coronet—red ones, I mean; there are plenty of *Noisettes* and *Boursaults*, and some *Maréchals Niel*, but

we do not want them. I am afraid the crimson roses are almost over. Ah ! I have it; there are perfect thickets of the coral-tree, and all laden with blossoms, in papa's pet sub-tropical *parterre*. They will become you marvellously. I shall twine them with your *coiffure*—what splendid dark hair yours is!—and you shall have a little bouquet fastened at your waist. Now, then, are you ready ?

The girls had a pleasant stroll; for a French breakfast, as you know, is seldom served before noon, when it partly answers to our luncheon, or early dinner; they even ventured a little way into the forest. Returning, Méranie gathered her coral buds and flowers, and, mixing them with a little Cape jasmine, wove them into an elegant coronal, which, she declared, suited Anne à merveille ! as, indeed, it did. Anne had never looked better than on that sunny morning of her eighteenth birthday.

They were leaving the garden for the formal plots and terraces that surrounded the house, when Flora ran to meet them, waving her sun-bonnet as she came.

“He is come, chère petite maman !” she cried. “You must enter immediately. And oh ! what beautiful flowers in your hair ! *Vous avez un air superb, tout à fait comme une Princesse !*”

“Yes, you are quite à la *Princesse !*” interposed Méranie. “I wish I were tall and slender.”

“But,” asked Anne, “who is ‘he,’ petite ? Who has arrived ?”

“Why ! *cher papa Philippe*, to be sure ! And behold ! there he is, descending from the open window of the *salle-à-manger*. He arrived late last night, and he slept at the Grand Hotel. Are you not glad ?”

And truly Anne was glad—very glad. She did not bound towards him, as Flora did; but she advanced with a glow of pleasure on her face, and her eyes shining with delight. He came, extending both his hands, and she unhesitatingly put hers into them.

“Ah ! but this is charming !” she cried; “you are come for my birthday. You did not know that I was eighteen to-day ?”

“Did I not ?” he said, smiling down upon her, as she

stood on the lower step ; " I think I shall be able to prove to you that I did. How well you look, Anne ! You are *quite* a woman, now."

" Am I ? " she replied, a faint blush rising to her cheeks. He was looking at her with evident admiration, and with an expression quite new to her. The last time he saw her she was a mere schoolgirl, tall as she was now, and, in spite of her French dancing-master, still rather awkward —what her countrymen sometimes call " *gawky*." To-day she was stately and graceful ; she seemed but little above the ordinary height of women, and she was dressed as a young lady in society. It is wonderful what a difference long dresses make in a just-grown-up girl's appearance. Philip at once decided that she would turn out a splendid woman, and that she was not yet nearly at her best. But if she had been as brown as a gipsy, and attired in the commonest Manchester print, I think his heart would have beaten no less at that first sight of her after absence.

Madame Bléville called them in to breakfast ; she had already asked Philip to spend the day ; and afterwards she left him to talk to Anne and Flora, Madame de la Tour quietly assenting. Curiously enough, Madame, who was a veritable dragonness as regarded her pupils' intercourse with gentlemen, never seemed to extend her caution to M. Philip Rutland. She had always seen him acting, in some sort, the part of father, and she had a shadowy idea that the Wrefords and the Rutlands were very closely connected. His relations with Flora strengthened this feeling ; accordingly, she always treated him as if he were the father of his little ward, and the uncle or elder brother of Anne herself. So it came to pass that Philip and Anne were left very much together that day ; Flora, after awhile, being tired, as she said, with so much sober talk, was told to run away.

" Now tell me all about home," she said, when Flora had resumed her games with her little friends under the shade of a vast cedar on the lawn ; " though, somehow, I cannot think of it as home ; my thoughts always go to Ivyside, not to the West End, when I have a letter from my father. And, by the bye, he generally dates his letters

from Fenchurch Street. And what are the babies, my little brothers, like ? "

" Like other children, I imagine. They are fine-looking boys, but I do not fancy they are very strong ; the baby especially is so subject to croup."

" Are they like father, or like their mother ? "

" I can hardly tell you ; I have seen so little of them. Robbie, the eldest, is said to be the very image of his papa, but I thought he more resembled Mrs. Wreford. My aunt and my sisters say he is an exceedingly handsome child, and very forward. The baby, too, is a bonnie little rogue, I am told ; but still, they don't quite thrive as they should, because of these attacks of croup."

" My father is very fond of them, I suppose ? "

" He appears to be. Certainly, he is absurdly proud of them ; they are presented to everybody, and everybody is expected to praise their beauty and their superior intelligence. My aunt says she never saw young children with such wonderful complexions ; but she fears, in spite of their apparent robustness, that they will be difficult to rear ; though Nellie, as I remember, used to have croup every winter till she was seven years old. Now tell me about yourself."

" What can I tell you ? "

" Are you not almost tired of school life ? "

" No ; I am very happy with Madame ; she is more of a friend now than a schoolmistress, and I go out with her a good deal. I would rather stay here than go home to meet with disfavour and injustice from Mrs. Wreford, who will never like me any more than I shall like her. Still, I suppose the time must come ; I cannot be at school always. If father had not married again, I suppose I should have been recalled at least a year ago ; but, as it is, I am not wanted, and now there are the little boys. He just remembers that he has a daughter, and that is all, I am afraid."

" Perhaps he thinks more of you than you imagine, and some day he may think still more. However, I feel positive that you would never be happy under Mrs. Wreford's yoke."

" You think she makes my father happy ? "

"I could not give an opinion ; I have not thought Mr. Wreford looking quite so contented as formerly, but he must have a great deal upon his mind. The business has become something tremendous, and such a concern, however successful, must bring with it innumerable cares and burdens. They say in the City your father is making money as fast as he can ; and it is well, for the new establishment must cost him a pretty penny ! But to come back to yourself ; you must have a home of your own, my dear Anne."

"How can I ? It would seem so odd, not quite respectable, if I went back to London, and did not live with my father and his wife."

"There would be nothing odd in your living in your husband's home."

"That is another matter," she answered shyly, and colouring, as she turned away from Philip's earnest gaze. Instinctively she knew that this was not the Philip of old time ; he was changed, and she liked him not the less.

That blush and that maidenly shyness delighted him ; they gave him hope ; he had dreaded to find her as much at ease with him as she had been years ago, as Flora herself, who scarcely recollected her own father, and had long ago put her guardian in his place.

"But a matter for you to consider," he was beginning, pressing her hand as he spoke, when in burst the whole noisy troupe of children with Flora at their head, and Grandmamma Bléville behind them, begging them to come out to a feast of raspberries and cream and coffee, which was prepared in the little wood behind the Château. Anne rose readily, not sorry for the interruption ; Philip rose also, but it took all his amiability and all his self-control to accept the invitation with anything approaching to the suave politeness expected of him. And he actually held his birthday present in his hand.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE MULBERRY-TREE.

AND all day long the happy, unconscious children followed Mr. Philip Rutland about. He was very kind to them, and he took Flora on his knee, and let the little ones climb on his shoulders, and play that he was taken prisoner ; but *I* am afraid he privately wished them—his ward included—somewhere else. And all the while the locket and brooch were in his side pocket, burning through the silk and broadcloth of that receptacle, as it seemed to him. At last, the nurse came for her charges, and Flora accompanied them, generously promising not to stay long, and to return almost immediately to her guardian. “Now or never is my opportunity,” thought Philip, as Flora disappeared in the wake of the nursery party, while the two elderly ladies were nowhere to be seen. They were probably taking a *siesta* after the great heat of the day, in order to refresh themselves for the festivities of the evening ; but there was Méranie, and she seemed inclined to stay close by her friend, sitting at her side, or following where she went. Philip wished the nurse would come and take her away, or that some one would call her to the house. He decided at length on a bold step ; he would ask Anne to grant him a private interview, and, of course, Mademoiselle Bléville would politely vanish. So, feeling every inch an Englishman, he walked up to the young ladies as they sat still in the cedar shade, and began to talk with them. After a few minutes of desultory conversation, he said, “Anne, I have a few words for your ear ; would Mademoiselle Méranie denounce me as a barbarian if I asked you to take a solitary ramble with me in the Pleasance ? I have a message from my aunt, and some important business to discuss ; and I may be obliged to leave Fontainebleau to-morrow.”

“I should count you a barbarian, perhaps, if you were

a Frenchman," laughed Méranie; "but—well! I cannot say! I have known a countryman of my own take the same liberty, on more than one occasion, when all the elders were off guard; and I really think your English fashions are extremely comfortable. Why should you not talk to Anne if you wish it? You must have an immense deal to say to each other. But if your business is strictly private and confidential, I should advise you to go into the old kitchen-garden, where no one else will think of promenading. You know the way, Anne? the door in the wall, by the great *Reine Claude* plum-tree. You will find the key, if it should be wanted, on a nail belonging to the last espalier, and if you lock the door on the other side no one can interrupt you."

"Thank you," replied Philip; "we will choose the kitchen-garden, I think, for our *tête-à-tête*; but the door may remain on the latch; we are not going to organise a conspiracy." And he quietly drew Anne's arm under his own, as Méranie sauntered away in another direction. Anne felt very much as if she were taken possession of; but she certainly was not displeased.

"I hope there is some shade where we are going," said Philip, as the afternoon sun beat upon their heads. "This is splendid weather, and we ought not to complain; but, really, so much sunshine is personally inconvenient."

"If you were overheard, you would confirm the good people here in their settled conviction that we islanders are always grumbling about the weather! This blazing sun is good for the corn and for the vintage; but I am not sorry to be able to tell you that there is a delightful seat under a vast mulberry-tree in a cool corner of the kitchen-garden," replied Anne, demurely, as she felt under the espalier leaves for the rusty key. "Here it is; you had better put it in your pocket, Philip; for if it is left in the lock, one of the gardeners may come this way and fasten us in, and these walls would not be easy to climb, nor, except by accident, could we make anybody hear."

Philip did as he was advised, and, seeing the mulberry-tree at no great distance, he at once led Anne to the rustic seat placed round the venerable trunk, and found himself in a delightful sylvan pavilion. "Now," said he,

drawing forth his watch, "at what time are we to dine?"

"At six precisely; seven is our usual hour, but we are earlier this evening, because of the little dance which is given in my honour."

"And how long will it take you to dress?"

"Not more than a quarter of an hour; all my things are in readiness. Méranie will make me a fresh wreath after dinner."

"And it is now half-past four. We have a full hour, then, if we are fortunate enough to be left undisturbed. And first of all, my dear Anne, I must prove to you that I did not come here 'promiscuously,' as my sister Agnes would say. I remembered that it was your birthday, and I planned my journey accordingly. My aunt also remembered the pleasant fact, and here is a little memorial from her. I was to present it with her dear love and kindest wishes, and she hopes you may spend your next birthday in England."

"How very good of her! It is just what I like, so plain and so solid; and just what I wanted, too—a brooch quite good enough for a *jour-de-fête*, and yet not too fine for an ordinary occasion. Tell her—no! I will write to her, and put my thanks on paper."

"That will be best; I am not, I am afraid, the most trusty messenger in the world. But I have something else, Anne; I was presumptuous enough to believe that you would not despise a little present from myself. Can I persuade you to wear this locket for *my sake*?"

"Oh, Philip, how beautiful! What a lovely diamond! and I am so fond of this dull-chased gold. And such a sweet little necklace!"

And she coloured as Philip clasped it round her neck. "Only," she continued, a little shyly, "I am not sure whether Madame will approve. She does not like girls to wear expensive ornaments. Cecile Dubourg had a set of pearls, but Madame would not allow her to wear them while she remained a school-girl."

"But you are not a school-girl; at eighteen you may surely take rank as a 'young lady.'"

"In England—yes! But here I am only a *jeune*

personne. French girls must dress quietly, and hear, and see, yet say nothing. It is not even etiquette to talk to one's partner in the dance—oddly enough, though, you may polk or waltz with any stranger, provided your chaperone does not object."

"That reminds me we are going to have a little family dance this evening. I hope you are not engaged?"

"Yes, I am. I am going to open the ball with M. Bléville himself. He dances splendidly, and as only a Frenchman can, though he is past sixty. I could not refuse my host, you know."

"Certainly not. But you will give me the two next dances?"

"Yes; I think I may promise so much."

"And the supper-dances?"

"I could not answer for that; Madame might not approve."

"My dear Anne, do you not think it is full time you were emancipated from Madame's control?"

"I suppose it is. I am old enough to leave school, undoubtedly; but, as I told you before, I prefer Madame de la Tour's just and kind sway to Mrs. Wreford's capricious thraldom. I prefer to remain here, for some time longer, at least. I have no place at home—especially in the new home, with which I have no associations. Dear old Ivyside! how I grieved when I heard that father had decided to leave it."

"Perhaps you will go back some day—who knows? You are right about the home over which your step-mother reigns; it would never be *home* to you—merely an honourable shelter. I told you just now that you wanted a home of your own, and I was going to explain, when those little angels broke in upon us, and carried us off to their *fête-champêtre* under the great cedar. Anne, do you think you could be happy in a home of mine that would be yours also? Could we not keep house together—you and I, dear Anne?"

"I don't quite understand," was Anne's nearly inaudible reply. Her face was almost the colour of the coral flowers in her hair, and her eyes were bent on the grass, as if she were counting the scattered mulberries that lay

there. But I think she did understand, only in her confusion she knew not what else to answer.

"*Don't you understand, Anne?* I want you for my own Anne while life lasts—for my own dear wife, mistress of my house, of myself, and of all that I possess. Will you come to me, dear?"

"*Oh, Philip!* *Ought I?*" The rosy glow still suffused her cheeks, but she looked him full in the face now. "Would it be for your good? Would it make you really happy?"

"Indeed it would, and I cannot doubt but that it would be for my good. The only question is whether I could make you happy. Anne, I have wanted you for years."

"For years! Why, I have only just left off being a child. I am surely too young for you; you are twelve years older than I am!"

"Almost old enough to be your grandfather! What are twelve years on the right side? A positive advantage, to my mind. And I believe I fell in love with you when you were a little girl, and have been thinking about you ever since. You are not going to say me nay, are you, Anne? Cannot you love me?"

"I think I can, but I am not sure; and in such a case it must be something more than thinking. There must be no doubt at all about it."

"But you do love me a little, do you not? It would soon grow to more, if you would let it. Tell me you do care for me, Anne—*just a little!*"

"I care for you a great deal, I am sure; but I am not certain that it is the right sort of caring! You have always been so very kind to me—and—and—well! I believe you are pretty nearly all I have in the world. My father is generous, and will always do the right thing by me—if he can. Then Madame is all very well, and I have made many friends during the last few years—Marguerite and Méranie, and others, not forgetting Nellie. But these girls will all marry, and closer ties will necessarily engross them. Madame and I must part; I should not care to spend my days in France. Besides, there are many points of difference between us—as religion, conventional ideas, and the like. I am quite content to remain with her

somewhat longer, but I do not cling to my present mode of life. I confess I do sometimes suffer from mild attacks of *mal-de-pays*. You are the only person who really seems to want me."

"Then I think I should have what I want. Did it never occur to you that I might some day ask you to be Mrs. Philip Rutland?"

"Never till to-day, and then, I confess, it did flash across my mind. But I told myself I was very foolish and conceited, and I tried to put it out of my thoughts."

"Just tell me one thing, Anne—is there any one else, any other man for whom you have—let us say, a *liking*?"

"No one; how should there be? Though I have a faint suspicion that Madame de la Tour would have had no objection to receive me as a daughter. Oh, no, Philip, there is no one whom I like in the least—not in that way, I mean."

"And you believe that I most truly and heartily love you, and you alone of all women, and that my dearest hope is to be your husband?"

"Yes, I believe it, for you say it, and all the years we have been friends I have never known you say what you did not sincerely mean. It is myself I doubt, not you, Philip! Ought I to let you engage yourself to me? May you not do far better for yourself? Should not your wife be a brilliant, accomplished woman of the world, not a mere school-girl who knows almost nothing of English society?"

"I do not want a 'woman of the world!' I would not on any account marry such an one. You are brilliant and accomplished enough; and if that is all, darling, if you can put up with me, I do not see why we should hesitate a moment longer. Anne, I make no wild professions, no passionate avowals; but, as God is my witness, I declare that I love you with all my heart; that for at least three years I have looked forward to this day as to the commencement of a happier, worthier life. No other man will ever love you better than I do; I doubt if any other will love you as well, as unselfishly, for if I thought that marrying me you would be less happy than you deserved to be, I would go away without another word. Nay! I

would never have come, had I not believed that I might be a blessing to you, as I know full well you will be to me, if only you give me your promise. What does your own heart say?"

"My heart says, 'yes,' but one's own heart, one's inclinations, are not always to be trusted. Suppose, after all, I should find out that I had only cared for you as the kind friend of my childhood; that the love I gave was not the love you have every right to expect?"

"I am not afraid; I am more than ready to risk it. Should you like to hear that I was going to marry some other woman?"

"I am afraid I should not; but if it were for your happiness, I would try to like it. I care for you so much that I want you to do the very best for yourself."

"This is the very best I can do for myself. You forget, dear, that I am no boy! I shall be thirty next birthday, and at my age a man knows, if ever, what he really wants, and he can distinguish mere fancies from true love itself; nor is he likely to deceive himself. Anne! let me woo you in nobler words than any of my own.

" 'My bride,
My wife, my life. Oh, we will walk this world
Yoked in all exercise of noble end,
And so through those dark gates across the wild
That no man knows. Indeed I love thee: come,
Yield thyself up; my hopes and thine are one;
Accomplish thou my manhood and thyself;
Lay thy sweet hands in mine, and trust to me.' "

And Anne, for answer, laid her hands in her lover's without a word; and it was enough; one clasp of the soft, tremulous fingers, one look into the true, maidenly face, satisfied him. Anne was all his own. That gentle hand-clasp was her promise, and he knew that she would never go back from the troth thus silently plighted on that golden summer afternoon, under the ripe mulberries.

The striking of the church-clock warned them that it was time to part; it was half-past five, and the dinner-bell would be punctual to the moment. They rose to return to the house; but ere they did so, Philip slipped the ring he had so providently brought with him on

Anne's "engaged finger." To his delight, it fitted perfectly.

"Would you have liked rubies better," he asked her, "or diamonds alone? Emeralds I would *not* give you; I will tell you why this evening, if we have the opportunity."

"I should like nothing better," replied Anne, looking lovingly at her beautiful circlet. "All women like diamonds, I believe; and of all stones, I like sapphires. They mean truth, I know! And somehow they look like it; that deep, lustrous blue reminds one of the sea in calm, and of the sky—the great, pure dome of heaven—in a cloudless noon. But, Philip, what will Madame say? It just strikes me that we have been doing a very improper thing!"

"Never mind! It is done, and cannot be undone. And we are English born and bred, though we plight our troth under a French mulberry-tree. When I leave you, I have a day's business in Paris, and another at Rouen; that completed, I mean to go straight to your father, and ask the seal of his approbation."

"Which will not, I feel sure, be withheld. Father has always liked you; he trusts you so completely. Mrs. Wreford will not make mischief, I hope!"

"I do not see how she can. No representations of hers could ever make any impression on me; and as for your father, I do not believe he would allow himself to be persuaded by her in any matter of importance. I have a slight suspicion, too, that her power over him is not what it was. Mistress Maud has held the reins a little too tightly, I imagine, on more than one occasion. I should think it would be a relief to your father to know that your future was happily determined. You must be an anxiety to him, surely! You ought to be. He knows that under his roof you will never find peace and rest; he knows by this time the pride and imperiousness of the woman whom he made his wife; and he must feel that your continued residence abroad will soon become so remarkable as to call forth injurious comments. People are already saying: 'When will Miss Wreford come home? Her school-days must be almost over,' &c. And though what 'people' say is not of any great consequence, I can

see that Mr. Wreford does not like it. He feels that your proper place is in your own father's house—such an establishment, too, as he keeps up! At the same time, he dreads to recall you, apprehending consequences. It may even be that he is forbidden to give the signal for your return."

"It is quite possible. Yes! all things considered, I think he ought to be obliged to you for taking me off his hands, just as he is puzzling himself as to my disposal; and I am sure dear mother would have consented, with all her heart."

"She did, in some sort, give her consent. The last time I ever saw her we spoke of you; I could see her sole regret, her only anxiety, was on your account. I believe she foresaw what would come to pass after her death! I said to her, 'I will be to Anne all I may be; I will never desert her while I live. She has a friend—*more than a friend in me!*' I could not say more, for you were such a child, at least, in years; and I had not then—I think—quite fixed upon you as my future wife, if I could be so blessed as to win your love. But your mother evidently took it in that way, for she said, 'You take away my last trouble. I leave my child to you; I can trust you.' She was too weak to say more, but she seemed perfectly satisfied and happy, and when I went away she asked me to kiss her—and I did kiss her, tenderly and solemnly, as if she had been my own dying mother. That was the seal of the compact, which, to-day, I ratify on your lips, my dear. I have never spoken of this to any living soul; if you had rejected me, I should have kept silence for ever. I tell it to you, my Anne, for it is your right to know it—yours, only."

They were only just in time to assemble with the others in the drawing-room before M. Bléville, with old-fashioned politeness, came to offer Anne his arm. Philip had to content himself with Méranie. Of course, this was not the arrangement he would have preferred. After dinner Méranie called Anne away to have her floral head-dress renewed; a fresh supply of the coral blossoms had been gathered during dinner-time. And then the guests of the evening began to arrive, and Anne, as queen of the *réveille-matin*,

found herself pretty fully occupied. She opened the ball, as arranged, with M. Bléville, who was quite a gentleman of the *ancien régime*, with a profound respect and a sincere liking for the English. He danced extremely well for his sixty years, and Anne, when she felt herself borne so lightly round the *grand salon*, could not regret the antiquated courtesy which had assigned her to her host. Afterwards came Philip, very much after the fashion of a lawful owner taking possession of his own. "Dear me," said M. Bléville to his wife, "how coolly these young Englishmen manage it! See M. Philippe! He approached Mademoiselle with just a little nod—you could not call it a bow! and without any ceremony, he tucks her hand under his arm, and examines her programme with the air of a critical authority. There! now they are off, and they seem to be enjoying their *ronde* amazingly. Much I admire the English; they are a noble people, and they know what they are about, and don't run into foolish extremes; but I must say they are not properly deferential to their ladies; *places aux dames* is evidently the exception not the rule of their lives."

"As to that," replied Madame, placidly taking a tiny pinch of perfumed snuff from her husband's jewelled *tabatière*, "we cannot expect perfect breeding from *ces Anglais*, though I grant they are good, and generally to be trusted! It strikes me, however, that this *cher* M. Philippe is Mademoiselle Vréford's *prétendu*—if not her *fiancé*. A young man does not look at a girl like that, unless he is in love with her. Ah, *m'amie*, I have never forgotten thy tender glances eight-and-thirty years ago! But then we had been betrothed with all possible solemnity in the presence of our near relations. Bah! they have curious notions, these rich English! I hope it will not enter into the head of our Méranie to undertake her own *marriage*. It is full time she was established, and I have already said a word to Madame Coquerel as to her son, M. Léon, and she entirely reciprocates."

"I do not think Méranie likes M. Léon particularly."

"Probably not. I should be truly sorry if she did. Méranie is too well brought up to cherish the slightest preference for any man before she is publicly recognised

as his *fiancée*. The English, my friend, have not our delicate sentiments of propriety."

"I grant it," replied M. Bléville, courteously; not for worlds would he have contradicted his wife. "But I must say I do not entirely disapprove of the English method. It seems to me that men and women should know more of each other ere they make so solemn and indissoluble a contract as that of marriage—more, that is, than is possible under our system. What did we know of each other when we married? We have done very well; but it might have been far otherwise—it has been otherwise in too many cases."

"Nothing of the sort," replied Madame, authoritatively. "My dear friend, you don't understand; fathers seldom, if ever, do. Are not our elder daughters most successfully established? Are not both our sons ranged exactly as we could wish? We had to trust our parents with our own affairs, and our children must trust us. What can boys and girls know of life? What can the *jeune personne*, fresh from her convent, or her school, know of matrimony? What ought she to know? Nothing! *nothing*! The mothers, who have had experience, undertake the whole responsibility. It is far wiser, far more modest, I say, than the English system, which lets a simple girl choose for herself, and run the risk of all sorts of misadventure. But then marriage is not a sacrament to Protestants; that makes all the difference."

"Perhaps so—perhaps so," politely asserted Monsieur, offering his snuffbox to Madame; "but I must confess I don't quite see it. Marriage may be a sacrament, as it doubtless is, but we certainly treat it as a mere matter of business. There they go, those two, right away! I do believe they mean to slip off into the garden."

"Oh! but that is scandalous! That cannot be permitted. I must instantly speak to Madame de la Tour."

"My excellent wife, I strongly advise thee not to interfere. Madame de la Tour knows what she is about, and she keeps her eyes very wide open."

Notwithstanding, Madame Bléville determined that her friend should be put on her guard. It was some time before she discovered her, playing whist with a grey-

haired General of the First Empire, his wife—a scraggy little woman, with hair equally grey, crowned with a chaplet of roses—and a sullen old gentleman from Strasburg, who believed in cards as the institution of modern society. He always played a silent game, and he lifted his finger to his lips, and reprovingly shook his head as Madame Bléville approached. Indeed, whist to him was no *game*; it was a noble science, worthy of the combined forces of all philosophers! He at once comprehended that his hostess had it in her mind to make some kind of diversion, and he frowned so savagely that the poor châtelaine had not the courage to address a word to the ancient General's partner. After a few minutes' mute inspection of Madame de la Tour's hand, Madame Bléville retreated; and so our heroine and her lover were undisturbed, and had the rose-garden all to themselves for one short, rapturous hour of a warm, balmy, moonlight August night—a situation which all newly-betrothed lovers will, I am sure, entirely appreciate.

Next morning, however, Madame de la Tour—her ear having been previously gained for one five minutes by Madame Bléville—had something to say to Mademoiselle Vréford. "What is this, my dear child?" she asked, with an air at once kind, shocked, and resolute. "I am credibly informed that you walked last evening in the moonlight—*alone* in the moonlight!—with your friend, Meester Philip Rootlande! Now, *ma chère*, English as you are, you must know that this is not at all *comme il faut*."

"I am engaged to Philip Rutland," said Anne, simply; "we are to be married—some day."

"*Mais!* It is impossible!" cried the *gouvernante*, in genuine surprise.

"By no means," returned Anne, with a certain *hauteur*, which she had never displayed before. "You will find that I am quite correct. Mr. Rutland came yesterday for the purpose of asking me to be his wife. He waited only till I was eighteen."

"It is very odd," sighed Madame. "Of course, *Monsieur* your father sent him? The lover is permitted to speak for himself in your country, I know; but this is

France, and I stand as your mother. He ought to have spoken to me."

"Perhaps so," said Anne, smiling at the idea of Philip making love by proxy. "But I am sure he never once thought of it. Forgive us, dear Madame; he proposed after the fashion of an honourable Englishman, and as such I accepted him. My father, I feel assured, will at once approve."

"I am sure I do not know what to say," responded Madame, gravely. "The whole thing is altogether out of order. If the story got wind, I am afraid it would injure me, as regards my establishment; and I did hope you and I were comfortably settled together for another year. Still, as you say, you are English, and your ways are not our ways. Monsieur Rootlande is, I dare say, *un bon parti!*"

And Madame felt extremely vexed, for it had occurred to her, as Anne suspected, to make an eligible match for her only and rather profligate son Louis, provided the difficulty of religion could be overcome. Her only hope for the prodigal lay in the speedy imposition of matrimonial fetters, and Mademoiselle Vreford's probable *dot* would be indescribably convenient. But now this fair scheme vanished, and Madame's airy castle in the clouds dissolved into utter nothingness. She was bitterly disappointed, and called herself a thousand fools. She had believed that Anne, like Flora, regarded Philip with something of filial affection, and it had never once occurred to her to mount guard against him.

It was so evident that every one at the Château-Méranie excepted—was more or less scandalised at this unconventional and unauthorised engagement, that Philip felt his best course was to rush back to England as fast as possible, and request Mr. Wreford immediately to ratify the contract, and put things in train for the marriage, which need not be delayed longer than was requisite for furnishing a house, and procuring the inevitable wedding-outfit.

Philip had a long conversation with Madame before he left; but he had no little difficulty in securing Anne to himself, even for a quarter of an hour. It was a good

thing he had seized his opportunity when he had it, and made all arrangements without delay, under the shade of that friendly and never-to-be-forgotten mulberry tree. So he left Château Bléville rather earlier than he had intended, but still triumphantly, for he had gained all for which he had striven. Anne had pledged herself to him ; his ring was on her finger, and she would keep faith, whatever should betide. Reluctantly he left his last kiss on her lips, and then turned his face towards England, intent upon seeing Mr. Wreford, and gaining his sanction to the engagement, with as little delay as possible.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

C A T H E R I N E ' S S U C C E S S O R .

ROBERT WREFORD was sitting alone in his private office in Fenchurch Street when Philip Rutland was announced. He had been married now nearly three years to his second wife, and, on the whole, things had gone prosperously with him. Business had increased wonderfully, and was entirely his own, for he had long ago bought out the share which Mr. Hankins' elderly son possessed in the concern, so that he was sole master on the premises, and recently even the old, time-honoured name of the Quaker firm had disappeared, and it stood simply as " Robert Wreford," *late* " Bright and Hankins" being sometimes added to the invoices of certain of the customers, who looked gravely, and shook their heads at the passing away of ancient observances. Cautiously, prudently, yet boldly, Robert had felt his way ; he had branched out on all sides, and at the same time he had carefully nourished the primitive roots of the former system ; he had made it the interest of his *employés* to serve him faithfully ; and, though he was a strict master, he was, on the whole, re-

garded as a just one, and it was pretty well understood throughout the establishment that thoughtful and dutiful service meant promotion.

But in spite of his success—*rare* success, I might say, for these go-ahead days of enterprise and competition—Robert Wreford was certainly not the man he had been when he led from the marriage-altar his queenly bride three short years before. He looked older than his years; he was still a handsome man, but grey hairs were very visible among his dark and still curly locks, deep lines were graven on his face, and he often gave a beholder the idea of his being care-worn and worried to the last pitch of endurance. Was the burden at home or in Fenchurch Street? some of his oldest intimates asked occasionally of themselves and of each other. Where did the shoe pinch? What was the skeleton in the secret cupboard? But Robert was not one to make confidences, and no one was able to report the cause or causes of his frequent moodiness and fits of evident depression.

The small, quiet room in which he sat was richly furnished; it was his own *sanctum*, into which very few persons were ever admitted, and in which only the most private business was transacted. Two or three of the head-clerks were privileged to have speech of him there, but that only in cases of emergency. No underling ever presumed to approach the master in his august retirement. On this occasion, after a gentle, hesitating tap on the mahogany panels of the door, the head-clerk—one of the oldest servants of the firm, and once, consequently, Robert's fellow-servant—just stepped within the room, and in a low, deferential tone observed that Mr. Philip Rutland was in his (Mr. Long's) room, requesting to see Mr. Wreford on special business, and was it that magnate's pleasure to grant the young gentleman a private interview?

“Who did you say?” asked Robert, rather sharply. “I wish you would speak a little louder, Mr. Long.”

“Mr. Philip Rutland, sir. Shall I say you are engaged?”

“Certainly not. I am comparatively disengaged, and I always see Mr. Rutland when he calls.”

"Yes, sir. Will you see him here, or in the outer room?" For there was another apartment called Mr. Wreford's room, as distinguished from his private retreat, in which he saw most people who came to him on business.

"I will see him here, of course."

The grey-haired clerk bowed respectfully and withdrew, closing without a sound the heavy door behind him. The next minute he was ushering into the presence Mr. Philip Rutland.

"Ah, Philip! where have you been all this time?" asked Mr. Wreford, as he shook hands with his visitor. "I have not seen you since we met at the Mansion House that day, and Mrs. Markham has not yet, I think, returned Mrs. Wreford's last call."

"Indeed, I cannot answer for the ladies; but I do know that I have not seen you for several months. We have both been very busy, I suppose."

"I have. One must either lose money or make it in these days. There is no such thing as doing a medium amount of trade. Have you been abroad?"

"I returned from France yesterday. I had business in Paris and in Rouen. I was afraid we were going to be let in for something heavy by those Bluetts. And I have been to Fontainebleau."

"Did you see Anne? I believe she is still there, at Château ——I forget the name."

"At Château Bléville! Mr. Wreford, I went to see Anne—I went for the sole purpose of seeing her; and now I lose no time in communicating to you the result of my visit. Have you any objection to receive me as your son-in-law?"

"Bless my soul!" cried Robert, in extreme amaze—he was by no means given to exclamations. "Do you really mean what you say?"

"I should scarcely insult you by jesting on such a subject. I suppose I ought to have come to you first, asking permission to address your daughter. It is too late, however, for that; I have proposed, and am, I am happy to say, accepted."

"You take away my breath! I have never thought of

my daughter as a grown woman, liable to proposals of marriage. Yet, now I come to think of it, her mother was not so much older when we were first engaged." And Robert sighed—a sincere tribute to the memory of his lost Catherine. Somehow or other, he had never recognised her manifold virtues so clearly and so fully as at present.

"Anne is eighteen," observed Philip; "I had made up my mind to propose on her birthday, and I did. I believe Madame de la Tour was very much scandalised that I did not send my aunt, or one of my married sisters, to conduct the initiatory stage of the courtship. But, Mr. Wreford, have I your consent?"

"Well—yes—I suppose so! You take me so much by surprise that I hardly know what to answer; but, at this moment, I really do not see any reason why I should play the iron-hearted father. If you want Anne, you may as well have her. It was only the other day I was thinking that it really was high time she left school, and came home 'for good,' as young ladies say. But there was the rub! I was not at all sure that such a coming home would be for *good!* for Maud and Anne have never got on together, and I am afraid that absence, in their case, has not made the heart of either grow fonder. Maud, I must confess, is extremely fond of her own way—in fact, she resents the very slightest opposition; and Anne is not of a pliable disposition. There would be the old feud of step-mother and step-daughter, if they were once domiciled together; then there are the little boys, their mother *might*—I don't say she would—consider Anne as in some sort their rival."

"It appears to me," said Philip, dryly, "that I am really doing the exact thing required in placing your daughter in a home of her own. Our early marriage at once disposes of every difficulty. It would be a great pity that your domestic peace should be disturbed; at the same time, it is not in the fitness of things that Anne should remain permanently at school. Then, I am to understand that my suit is not denied, that you fully sanction the engagement between Miss Wreford and myself?"

"You may understand as much. I have known you

from a stripling, and Anne's own dear mother was very fond of you. You have been always a favourite with the girl herself, I know; but precisely because you have been to her so much like an elder brother it never occurred to me to think of you as her future husband. Does your father know anything about it?"

"He does not know that I am actually engaged, for I have not yet seen him. He is at his new country-house near Sevenoaks, and I at once hastened here to make all the amends I could for my too speedy measures. After what Madame de la Tour said, and Mademoiselle Bléville implied, I was half afraid lest you might be displeased, and condemn me as culpably premature. My father knows that I am thinking of marriage, and that Miss Wreford is the young lady to whom I have long been attached, and he very fully approves, as does my aunt, Mrs. Markham. Anne is, and always has been, one of her very great favourites. My aunt will go with my father into the country, and reside with him still. The business will be, to all intents and purposes—*mine*. The town house will be given up to me whenever I require it. I am, of course, my own master, and I am old enough to know what I am doing in every sense of the word. I love Anne, and I wish to make her my wife at an early date from this."

"I am quite willing that you should. But have you reflected that Anne is no longer my heiress—that her brothers must take precedence of her?"

"Of course I have. I do not expect that you will let your daughter come to me quite empty-handed; but should you do so, let me distinctly state that it will make no difference to me. I can afford to take a dowerless wife, thank God! and though I do not affect to despise money, I can do without any of yours. I want my Anne herself, and not her possible fortune. As to my own affairs, you may look into them as closely as you please and whenever you please, and I am quite ready to make any reasonable settlement upon my wife."

"Anne will not come to you 'empty-handed,' and I am sure we shall not quarrel about the settlements. I cannot give her so much now as I could have wished. My

extended business requires, as you may guess, any amount of capital. My home expenses, too, are very heavy. Mrs. Wreford knows as well as any woman of her time—better than most—how to get through a great deal of cash. But I think I can give my daughter £5,000; only, I won't promise that there shall be anything more at my death. There may be; I can't say. At any rate, you must not count upon it."

"I shall be fully satisfied, Mr. Wreford, with the sum you mention, and I shall wish it to be entirely at Anne's disposal—settled on her and on her children. Now, how soon can we have the wedding?"

"You are in a desperate hurry. What does Miss Anne say?"

"I did not presume to go so far with Miss Wreford. I feared to alarm her by speaking too definitely, for she was a little inclined to imitate the example of the young Irish lady, who added to all the affirmatory clauses of the Marriage Service, 'Provided my father gives his consent.'"

"A very proper inclination. I am glad to find my girl so dutiful. Well, what is your own idea of the affair? What do you call an early day?—this time twelve months?"

"This time three months would be more to my mind. I shall refurnish, of course, very largely, and there will be painting, papering, and the like to be done, if I stay in the house, which has been my father's for the last ten years; but I had some idea of moving. Anne does not care for a fashionable neighbourhood, nor do I. Then there will be the all-important *trousseau* to be provided. I suppose Anne is woman enough to stipulate for the usual bride's outfit; though, if she does not mind about it, I am sure I do not. I do not see why we should not be man and wife early in December; then we might spend our Christmas in Rome, or anywhere else in the south of Europe."

"Early in December! And we are saying good-bye to August now! That is rather sharp work, Rutland."

"The sharper the better for me. After being so many years contented with my bachelor lot, I have taken a

sudden disgust for single blessedness, and I want to be married out of hand. I shall not feel settled now till the irrevocable vows are spoken. A man should marry at thirty, or not at all."

"But Anne is only eighteen."

"She will grow older every day; and the disparity, if you may term it so, is on the right side."

"I thought so once; but now I am not sure that it is desirable to have a wife so very much younger than yourself. She should be younger, of course, but not too much so—say five or six years, or, at the utmost, seven. However, all that sort of thing is your own affair; if Anne were twelve years older than yourself, I don't know that it would matter to any one else, provided you were both satisfied. For my own part, foolish people should have their own way, as well as wise ones. Well, marry when you please, as far as I am concerned; but remember, there is Mrs. Wreford to be consulted. It is just possible that she may entirely disapprove of the whole affair, and refuse her consent."

"Pardon me; but I shall not ask it. I have yours, and that is enough. Of course, we must respectfully consider Mrs. Wreford in making our arrangements. Anne will naturally wish to be married from her father's house, and of that house Mrs. Wreford is undisputed mistress."

"And master, too, sometimes!" laughed Robert. But there was an under-current of inexpressible bitterness in his tone, and Philip knew that he spoke sober truth under the guise of jest. "Don't let your wife get the upper-hand," he continued, still half jocularly; "hold your own from the very first, and don't let the grey mare be the better horse."

"In such a case, I should let my grey mare have the stable to herself, and she might run in single harness all her days. But I am not afraid; Anne resembles her mother, who was—dare I say it?—only too devoted a wife!"

"Only too devoted," responded Robert. "You say truly. May Anne be—" and he broke off abruptly. He was going to wish that his daughter might be to her

husband all that her mother had been to him ; when suddenly he remembered how little Catherine, with all her unselfish devotion, all her sweetness and tenderness, had been appreciated, and he had something more than a suspicion that his son-in-law elect knew very well how entirely this was the case.

Philip simply replied : "Yes ! my Anne graduated in a good school. I think I am very fortunate in gaining the affections of your first wife's daughter."

"Will you go back to dinner with me ?" asked Mr. Wreford. "Then you and Mrs. Wreford can settle things generally."

"Thank you, not to-day. I must put in an appearance at Sevenoaks. Having spoken fully to you, as a first duty, I am anxious now to tell my father that his desire is so speedily to be gratified. For the last two years he has bitterly bewailed my single estate, and all but implored me to become a Benedick."

But Philip quite comprehended that Robert did not care to face *ses dragons* alone.

That evening Mr. Wreford returned home rather earlier than usual, and found, to his dismay, his beautiful Maud in a far from amiable state of mind. She was evidently out of sorts, and disposed to sulkiness, and she greeted her lord with a scowl and with a frown, but in absolute silence. The servants downstairs had had a hard day of it, and they remarked to each other that missis had got out of bed on the wrong side that morning. The cook observed that Mrs. Wreford "had got her monkey up, and no mistake ;" the man-servant, who combined the duties of butler and footman, was very glad he wasn't master, whom he deplored from his heart.

It still wanted half-an-hour of dinner-time, when Robert, having made his regulation toilet, entered the drawing-room, where his wife sat. She did not even look up ; she stared moodily at the book before her without reading or attempting to read a line.

"Who do you think came to me to-day in Fenchurch Street, my dear ?" began Mr. Wreford, in his pleasantest tone.

"I am sure I do not know," was the careless and frigid

rejoinder of the lady, and her manner implied that she was also sure she did not care.

“Well! won’t you make a guess?”

“I never guess.”

“Then I must tell you, I suppose. It was Philip Rutland.”

“Oh, indeed.”

“And what do you think he came for?”

“How should I know? Pray don’t tell me! I wish you would not bring Fenchurch Street home with you. You know I hate business.”

“And yet to business you owe all the luxuries you enjoy,” he returned gravely, as he glanced round the perfectly-decorated and richly-furnished room, and again at Maud’s tasteful, costly toilet.

“So you often tell me!” she replied, so contemptuously that he winced. She never raised her eyes from the book she held, and he was beginning to feel extremely angry, but he knew from sad experience how worse than useless it was to repay her insolence in kind. He did say, however, “Put down that book, Maud, if you please. I have something to say to you; I am going to write to Anne, to bid her come home immediately.”

“You will do nothing of the kind! I will not have her here, instigating my servants to rebellion, and corrupting the minds of my innocent little children.”

“Take care what you say, Maud. Anne is my daughter, and I will not have her defamed. I tell you, Anne is coming home—to the house which is hers as much as it is yours—but only for a little while. She is engaged to be married.”

“Married! That child! I shall not countenance anything so absurdly improper.”

“She is no child; she was not a child when she went away two years and seven months ago; she has grown up since then.”

“And what fool is rash enough to want to marry the little vixen?”

“Philip Rutland will marry her. No one knows better than he what kind of temper she has.”

“She has her father’s sweet temper, and her mother’s wishy-washy character.”

"Be good enough to leave her mother alone, say what you will of her father. The marriage is to take place as soon as possible?"

"Is it?"

"Maud, do you want to put me in a fury?"

"It is quite immaterial to me; go into a fury, if it amuses you."

"Don't be an idiot! I want you to make arrangements. Philip and I thought if Anne herself would give consent, that the wedding might come off early in December; that will allow three full months for necessary preparations. I should like the thing to be done handsomely—in your own style! I am not going to be niggardly, I promise you. You find taste and judgment; I'll find the cash. What do you say?"

"That I will not be troubled with your daughter's wedding! I shall not sanction so foolish a proceeding; let her marry if she will, and if you will; but into this house she does not enter."

"Maud, are you mad—quite mad?"

"Not that I know of. Lunatics, I believe, do generally imagine those about them to be mad when any difference in opinion arises. I should be crazy to let that girl come here. Have I not said fifty times over I never would put up with her?"

"You have said many things of which you ought to be ashamed; some day you will say a little too much. Yes! you may smile; but you will find I, too, can play the autocrat."

"I don't doubt it! Have I not seen you domineering over that poor, weak Catherine till she scarcely dared admit that her little soul was at her own disposal? But I am not Catherine, Mr. Wreford."

"You are not worthy to wipe the shoes of that sweetest and best of women."

Maud laughed outright.

"You told another tale four years ago at Etretat, in Paris, and afterwards," she said, sneeringly. "You were always lecturing and finding fault with your sweet Catherine *then*. Good heavens! what a tame creature she was! what a spider-hearted, timid mouse!"

Robert rose, unable any longer to contain himself.

"I leave you, madam, to your own reflections," he said quietly, but in a voice that made the lady quail, in spite of her bravado. "I shall not dine at home, I wish to escape from your society. Be good enough calmly to reflect upon your present indecent behaviour, for it seems to me that our conjugal relations have reached a crisis. Prepare yourself to receive my daughter amiably, and to give her her proper place under her father's roof till she becomes a wife; or—cease to be *my* wife."

"You will hardly get a divorce on such grounds," she replied, with that exasperating silvery little laugh of hers.

"I shall not try for one. But I *can* obtain a legal separation; and you know the disadvantages under which a woman so situated invariably labours."

"I am not in the least afraid. You, of all men, would never risk the scandal."

"We shall see, madam."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MRS. WREFORD did not at all relish the posture of affairs, and the more she reflected the more uncomfortable she became. She resolved, however, that she would be firm; nothing should tempt her to succumb. She would not have Anne at home at any price, nor would she countenance the proposed marriage. She dined in solitary state, not making, however, very much of a repast, for the skirmish with her husband had considerably diminished her appetite. Again and again she sent away her plate almost untouched, pettishly complaining that there was nothing fit to eat, and sending more than one unpleasant message to the cook. As soon as the dessert was on the

table, she rose and returned to the drawing-room, thoroughly out of humour with herself and with everybody about her—most of all with her husband, who had dared to show his displeasure, and had actually threatened her with reprisals.

The gas was partially lighted, but she turned it down till it was scarcely visible. The windows were still open, for the evening was oppressive, and the blinds had not been lowered. She took a chair, and seated herself almost on the balcony, apparently watching the scene below, but really absorbed in her own thoughts, which were far from agreeable. Robert's last words were still ringing in her ears. Something had been said about going that night to the theatre, and stalls had been secured, for there was a play on that was having a famous run, and Mrs. Wreford particularly wished to see it. She was passionately fond of the stage; but now the vouchers were useless—she could not possibly appear alone.

"Where can I go?" she questioned herself wearily. "I hate a solitary evening. If I had only known that Robert was going to be such a bear, I would have sent round to Laura; ten to one she has no engagement. And why should I not send now? I am not going to mope because my husband chooses to play truant. I shall die of the spleen if I stay here, with all the Park lights glittering out yonder, and nothing to do but sit still and nurse my grievances. I'll send a line."

No sooner said than done. She turned up the gas a little, wrote a few hasty words on a scrap of paper, and ordered a servant to take it immediately to Miss Gresley, who lived now with her parents, in a high-rented, stuffy, inconvenient little house in one of the humbler Belgravian streets.

Miss Gresley received Maud's note as a perfect god-send; for she, too, had been disappointed of her evening's amusement, and she was yawning over a trashy novel, while her papa read his newspaper and her mamma dozed in her well-cushioned chair. Maggie Gresley had married two years before, so that Laura was now the only one at home, and they very seldom had visitors—such, at least, as she cared to entertain. Mr. and Mrs. Gresley

were getting old, and liked to be quiet ; and when Laura complained of the dulness of her life, she was twitted with being " still on hand," while all her sisters were successfully established. " You have had your opportunities," her mother would observe, when Laura wanted to go out, or to receive at home ; " and you have managed to waste them all. Your day is over ; you must make way for another generation. It is simple folly to spend money on superfluous man-traps, and I am tired of dragging you about to balls and parties. You must go out with your sisters, or with Maud Wreford, if you go out at all."

Maud had just given a hint of the theatre, so Laura caught up a gauzy shawl, twisted a bunch of fuchsias in her hair, and ran down to the cab which was waiting for her. In a few minutes she was in Mrs. Wreford's drawing-room, and wondered to find her friend sitting in the dark, and apparently enjoying the fragance of the flowers in the balcony, or, perhaps, counting the glittering lines of lamps, as they stretched across the Park in every direction, or lit up the dark bosom of the Serpentine.

" Why don't you have some light ? " cried Laura, as she sank into a chair. " And where's Robert ? And is anything the matter ? "

" Robert has behaved most *brutally*," was the emphatic reply. " As for where he is, I don't know any more than you, nor do I care to know. I hope he will not come home till he is prepared to apologise for his coarse behaviour."

" That is not quite a wife-like speech, Mrs. Maud. So he has turn'd brutal on your hands ? I thought only the lower classes chastised their rebellious wives. What have you done ? "

" Don't be ridiculous, or I will not talk to you. A man may be brutal to a woman without beating or kicking her. Robert has hurt my feelings."

" Your pride and your *amour propre*, that is. I say, Maud, you will go too far some day, and Robert and you will be two people. It strikes me that if once Mr. Wreford were deeply offended, you would find it no easy matter to conciliate him. I can fancy him obdurate, implacable—altogether estranged."

"Nonsense! I know my own husband, surely! I have him well in hand, I can tell you; and if he takes a fit and tries to kick over the traces, I know how to punish him. From the first day I knew Robert Wreford, I comprehended his weak points, and perceived how he could be managed. A certain amount of coercion, a due admixture of flattery, and he generally yields. Besides, he is absurdly fond of me; and if I only sulk or cry, as seems most expedient, or, if need be, go into hysterics, he is quickly brought to terms, and reduced to a proper state of meekness and subjection. If he choose to quarrel with me, he can; but he will have by far the worst of it. As it is, I shall hold my own and resent his conduct, even after he has abjectly apologised. He will soon find out that he has a woman of spirit to deal with, that he is not going to play lord and master over me. I am made of far other stuff than that poor, limp Catherine, whom of late he seems disposed to canonise. He would like to add St. Catherine of Hackney to the list of daily-saints."

"Don't make him regret Catherine, Maud."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply what I say. You have been his wife now for three years; his passion has had time to cool itself; and if he begins to extol poor Catherine, it is probably at your expense. He may make comparisons which are not in your favour."

"Don't be disagreeable, Laura. What can an old maid like you know of matrimonial differences?"

"Old maids, as bystanders, sometimes see more of the play than the combatants themselves. You may believe me or not, Maud, but I tell you that you are on the verge of provoking Robert beyond all bounds. I have seen what I have seen, and I have heard what I have heard, and I think his patience is wonderful, but—*pretty nigh exhausted!* Now, what's the row?"

"It's that detestable girl again. Whatever you do, Laura, never marry a widower with a growing-up daughter."

"Poor Anne! she has always seemed to me an extremely well-principled girl. You might have made a friend of her, had you chosen."

"She hated me from the first; she suspected me; she set herself against me. If I had not at once taken my part, it would have been a struggle between us as to who should rule."

"I think not. However, I will not argue that point. What has Miss Wreford done now to offend your Imperial Highness?"

"She is coming home—that is, her father says so; but, of course, I shall not permit it."

"You must be crazy, Maud! Anne is quite old enough to leave school; you could not expect to keep her there for ever. I am surprised that Robert should have let her remain so long. Her proper place is in her father's house; and the world will think it very strange if you do not do your duty by her, and take her into society."

"The world may think what it likes!—I will have nothing to do with her, and I will not have her here, making mischief, and plotting against me and my children."

"Once for all, Maud, what has Anne Wreford ever done to justify your speaking of her in such terms? She at once gave way to her father's wife, she relinquished every appearance of authority, she went away to France, content to resume the rôle of school-girl, and she has remained with Madame de la Tour without complaint up to the present time, making no claims, striving for no recognition of her undoubted rights."

"I tell you she hated me from the first! Even in her mother's lifetime she disliked me—as soon as her father was free she took her part against me; foolish child, as if she could cope with me! Then, when the marriage was arranged, how did she behave? her father would have turned her out of the house then if I had not pleaded for her. Why! you know better than I can tell you what happened that day when we were lunching at Ivyside. Did she not absolutely refuse to come to the wedding? Wild horses should not drag her there, forsooth! Such insolence! such unfilial behaviour! And you can take her part, Laura! I am disgusted with you."

"I cannot help that. For the life of me, Maud, I cannot see the grounds on which you continue to wage war on poor Anne Wreford. The girl idolised her mother;

who shall blame her for that? You took that mother's place, with what she considered indecent haste, and the news of the impending marriage came upon her like a thunder-clap. In her first grief and passion she spoke out very plainly; she suffered bitterly. I shall never forget her face that day in the garden—it was deathlike; she frightened me. But you might have won her—you might have won her, Maud! A little sympathy, a little common kindness, and you and she might have been friends for life."

"Never! she would always have been jealous on her own account, as well as on her mother's. She believed that I came between her and her father."

"And did you not?"

"Of course I had the first place; it was my due. A wife comes before a child. But Anne is of an essentially jealous disposition, as her mother was before her. Oh, dear! how miserable that foolish Catherine did look when sometimes Robert, as was natural, gave the *pas* to me."

"I think it was most *unnatural*. Suppose he gave the *pas* now to any other woman? Why, Maud! you would be downright furious—there would be a regular explosion, perhaps a scandal. I think I see *you* meekly acknowledging the superiority of any one of your lady friends, and permitting her a Platonic intimacy with your husband!"

"I'll acknowledge superiority when I find it. As it is, I am not at all afraid; for Robert—though we fall out sometimes, as at present—thinks no woman my equal in beauty, in wit, in grace, or in cleverness."

"How delightful it must be to have so excellent an opinion of oneself! There is no satisfaction like self-satisfaction. But I thought we were going to the theatre?"

"So we are, if you care to go. I sent for stall-tickets yesterday; it is a pity they should be wasted, is it not?"

"A very great pity. Don't let us think of such a thing! I care very much to go; I am wild to see this piece; I have heard so much about it. We two can do it deliciously, and you may as well let me come back with you to sleep, for the old folks toddle off to bed so early,

and are immensely disgusted if the house is not shut up directly after eleven. And it will be later than that if we stay for the afterpiece."

"You are very welcome to sleep here, but I shall certainly not stay for the afterpiece, which is a vulgar, screaming farce to please the gallery. I would just as soon have some one here to-night when Robert returns, for I don't mean to speak a word to him; he will find me an animated iceberg. In such cases a third party takes off the awkwardness. I can talk to you, while I freeze to him."

"Not a very delightful prospect for me, assisting at a matrimonial quarrel. I shall feel shockingly *de trop*, thinking, too, that you would make it up so much more easily if you were alone together."

"I shall not make it up. You'll see, Laura, my gentleman will have to eat humble-pie—and a pretty good slice of it, too—before he is restored to favour. I'll ring for the brougham; I told them to have it in readiness. Would you not like to wear my pearls in your hair?"

"Dearly I should. I did think of asking you to lend me something; I came away in such a hurry."

And then the ladies went upstairs to Maud's room, and made their little arrangements; and while they waited for the carriage, Mrs. Wreford said, carelessly, "Did I tell you that that foolish Anne wants to be married?"

"I should let her be married, then, and so dispose of all possible difficulties. That is the best piece of news I have heard for a long while; you can bury the hatchet on her wedding-day, for afterwards there will be no danger of clashes. Who is it? Some beggarly Frenchman, I am afraid."

"No, indeed; it is Philip Rutland. He seems to have been in love with her ever since she was twelve years old. He went over to Fontainebleau the other day, proposed, and was accepted, and Mr. Wreford has given his consent. That is why she is to come home."

"A very substantial reason why she should. She must be married from this house, of course; it is her right; and if Mr. Wreford is the man I take him for, he will rule in this particular. If she were the most obnoxious creature

imaginable, you might welcome her under those circumstances. A few months, perhaps, only weeks, of her society, for there would be nothing to wait for, and you would be respectably quit of her. Maud, did you ever hear that 'whom the gods will destroy, they first make mad'? It strikes me you are as nearly mad as you can be without being a downright lunatic. I really gave you credit for having more sense."

And then the servant came to say the brougham waited at the door, and they drove away across the Park and through the lighted West End streets, till they reached the theatre, and found the orchestra just finishing the overture, and the curtain slowly rising. Maud at once found fault with the seats; they were too far back, too near the bottom rows of the pit.

"I like it so," said Laura; "we can hear every word where we are; and being nearer destroys the illusion."

"The distance is all very well, but the pit-people can be very disagreeable if they like; we are quite too close to them."

The "pit-people," however, behaved very properly, and the ladies soon forgot their vicinity. The play was a popular one, and the house was crowded from the orchestra stalls and the stage boxes to the galleries. Maud and Laura were intensely excited; they scarcely drew breath till the drop-scene fell, amid loud plaudits, at the close of the second act. Then, in the interval which ensued—a tolerably long one—they fanned themselves and dallied with their costly scent-bottles, and finally swept the house with their opera-glasses.

"I wish we had had a box," said Maud, languidly; "I do not care for these stalls so much. They are nice enough in themselves, but you always run the chance of getting close up to the pit-people, who are often noisy and vulgar, and apt to smell of smoke and peppermint. There is a woman behind me crunching peppermint drops at this moment."

"Oh, well! it might be worse; onions would be worse. For a small party, and especially for two people, I prefer the stalls. Look, Maud! there is Emily Gateacre in the dress-circle."

"That is not Mrs. Gateacre, though it is extremely like her ; besides, I know Emily is at Trouville. Look again!"

And she handed the glasses to Laura ; they had but one pair between them.

"You are right," said Laura, after a pause ; "but I never saw a more wonderful likeness. Ah, there is Eugene Marley ; and what a lovely girl he has with him ! That must be Alice Burgoyne, to whom people say he is engaged. I don't know—I cannot believe in Eugene being really engaged ; he is such a flirt, and, as everybody knows, not a marrying man. That must be Miss Burgoyne, Maud, for she is like the Princess of Wales, and I remember old Cottle saying that she might pass for the Princess at a little distance. What is the matter ?"

She might well ask, for Maud was standing white and transfixed at her side. The next moment she had snatched the opera-glasses, and looked fixedly at some one eight or nine rows back, in the very centre of the pit. She looked intently, but the glasses trembled in her fingers, and in another minute fell crashing upon the floor, while she sank shudderingly in her chair.

"Maud ! Maud ! what is it ?" whispered Laura, terribly frightened. "Smell my salts ! let me fan you ! What did you see ?"

"Oh, my God ! my God !" moaned Maud ; and Laura thought she would have sunk down upon the footstool. The band had commenced a joyous, noisy strain, so that the awful words were not overheard, though more than one person glanced round, supposing the lady to be faint.

"Let us go," urged Laura ; "you look like death. Quick ! the curtain will rise in another minute, and the empty seats at the end of our row will fill again. The road is clear now ; let us get out while you are able."

"I must look again ! I must make myself sure—quite sure !" was Maud's low answer ; but she spoke more to herself than to her companion, and she nerved herself to stand upright, with her face to the pit, once more staring through the glasses. Laura tried to discover the object at which she looked, but she saw no one who would be likely to call forth so much emotion. At the spot at

which the glasses were apparently levelled was a commonplace *bourgeois* group, such as you may see any night in any London theatre : a well-to-do, portly citizen with his own womenkind—two rosy, over-dressed daughters, a comfortable-looking, well-pleased wife—and a lean strippling, evidently their son. The people right and left of this family party were equally common-place ; *they* could be nothing to Maud, any more than Maud to them. Just before them were some simpering girls and their beaux ; and close behind, standing up and inspecting the boxes to the right, was a very peculiar-looking man—but not the sort of man with whom Maud was likely to be even remotely acquainted. He was tall, high-shouldered, and his extremely shabby clothes hung loosely upon him. He was scarcely respectable enough for his company ; his place seemed rather with the gods in the gallery than with the worthy, decently-apparelled people in the pit. Laura did not closely examine his features, but she was struck with his *tout-ensemble*, and by the strange expression of his face. She felt instinctively that he was not at all the sort of personage one would wish to cultivate. She would know him again, at first glance, wherever she might meet him. . Suddenly he turned, and caught sight of the lady with her glasses levelled towards him, and his countenance all at once lighted up with devilish and triumphant satisfaction. Surely he recognised Maud ! there was no mistaking the mingled astonishment and exultation of his face ; it must be Maud, for Laura herself was certain she had never seen him before. For a moment the man appeared to be riveted to the spot ; then he moved, and was evidently poking for his hat under the benches. He was going to watch for them at the entrance of the theatre.

But just then the curtain drew up, and the favourite actress came forward to the footlights, and commenced one of her most famous speeches. The pit was packed ; the audience were impatient of disturbance, and it took the man who had played the part of the Gorgon's Head some minutes to fight his way out into the vestibule.

Meanwhile, Maud and Laura passed easily from the stalls, and reached the street. Of course, Mrs. Wreford's

carriage was not in attendance, but there were several cabs waiting to be hired, and Laura instantly held up her finger. Half a minute, and they were speeding along the Haymarket ; their movements had been so swift compared with those of the man in the pit, that they were in Pall Mall before he had reached the outer door. Then he asked if two ladies had not just driven away in a carriage or a cab. He spoke with a strong nasal accent. The official to whom he addressed himself was so disgusted with his appearance that he did not think it worth his while to satisfy "the fellow's impudent curiosity."

"Two?" he answered roughly ; "yes! many a two! Stand aside there ! you've no business at that door," as a carriage and pair dashed up and a gentleman and lady alighted. The man shrugged his shoulders and turned away ; then he passed out into the street, cursing and swearing, *sotto voce*, in several languages.

He was Philip Rutland's *mauvais sujet* of *Père la Chaise*!

CHAPTER XL.

MISS GRESLEY'S OATH.

THE ladies were silent as they drove along. Once Laura asked her friend if she felt a little better ; the only reply she received was a deep and hollow groan. Miss Gresley was aghast, and longed for the termination of the journey ; brief as it was, the distance seemed interminable, and yet they were driving at full speed. Laura gave a sigh of relief as their conveyance drew up at the Wrefords' house. "Your mistress was taken ill, and we could not wait for the brougham," she said to the servants who crowded to the door. Maud spoke no word. She passed along the hall and went upstairs slowly but unfalteringly ; her movements were those of a somnambulist. The maids

eyed her curiously, and Léonie followed Miss Gresley into the drawing-room to offer her services. " *Bon Dieu!* " said the girl to herself ; " she looks like one struck for death ! " Then aloud, " Oh, Mademoiselle, what has chanced, I pray you ? I never saw her look like that."

" It was the heat and the excitement, I suppose, " replied Laura. " Go and fetch some wine—no ! Cognac would be better."

" But yes, mademoiselle, it is a case for Cognac ; see ! her lips are bloodless ; and feel her hands—they are like stone ; all the life is going out of her. It is the coming tempest, some people—I, who speak to you, am always ill in the thunder and lightning." It had lightened all the way home, and the thunder had pealed rather loudly as they crossed the Serpentine ; but Maud had not noticed it. Still, Laura thought, her indisposition might be very well put upon the electrical state of the atmosphere, combined with the close air of the theatre.

" Very likely that is it, " she said quietly ; " it is making me feel ill ; we shall have a grand storm by-and-by. I am glad we are safe at home. Why don't you fetch the brandy ? "

Léonie hustled down into the dining-room, and while she was gone Maud said hoarsely, " Send her away, Laura—I implore you send her away ! I must speak. I cannot bear it. I must be alone with you."

With some difficulty the *soubrette* was persuaded to withdraw. Greatly offended, she stalked out of the room to unbosom herself to her friend the butler. " Something has happened, " she remarked, when she had shut herself into Mr. Prance's pantry. " It is something more than the thunder and the lightning. Bah ! I am not an infant."

" She and master had a quarrel to-night ; I heard 'em at it, and he's gone off in a huff. I shouldn't wonder but he keeps away till to-morrow evening."

" I know, I know ! But it's not that ; Madame cares not that she offends Monsieur. My belief is she has seen a ghost—or else—the devil."

" ' Faust ' is not on at either of the Opera Houses, I know, " replied Mr. Prance ; " but I suppose the old gentleman is generally on the prowl. I say, Léonie, it really

is overpoweringly hot to-night, and electricity always tells upon the nerves. Mrs. Wreford has dismissed you, do you say? So much the better. You and I and cook will have a nice little bit of supper together, on the quiet, you know; and I think I can find a stray bottle of champagne. It will hearten us up if a storm comes. I can't abear thunder and lightning, especially after dark. I don't mind it so much in the day. Leave the mistress to Miss Gresley, and we'll enjoy ourselves."

Meanwhile Laura administered the Cognac, and ere long Maud revived; the colour came back to her lips, and she spoke almost in her natural tone: "Laura, I think you are my friend?"

"You know I am, Maud. I sometimes think I am the best friend you have, for I dare to speak the truth to you."

"I wonder if I dare trust you!"

"If you wonder, you had better not." And Laura drew herself up proudly, and drummed a tune with her fingers.

"Have patience with me, Laura," rejoined Maud. "I am in sore trouble. I suffer the tortures of hell! I must tell some one, or I shall go stark, raving mad. I cannot keep the awful secret to myself. I, who am so strong—I must lean on some one; be good to me, Laura."

"There is your husband; he is the fittest person to lean upon. Though he is angry with you now, he will take you to his arms the moment you tell him your trouble. You had better tell him, Maud."

"Tell him! Oh, Laura, he is the last person who must know. Oh, my God! my God! do the dead verily arise? Was it a spectre—or a horrible delusion—or was it—? What have I done that so terrible a judgment should fall upon me?"

"Maud! I shall think you really are mad if you do not speak more plainly. You might be rehearsing a tragedy for the stage."

"A tragedy indeed! Would that it were a play—a piece of acting, and nothing more! If you could prove to me that it was *not* real, I would joyfully give you every jewel I possess—nay, I would be your slave for life! No,

I am not raving. I will tell you; but swear to be secret as the grave."

"I never yet broke my word to you, Maud. I have helped you through many a scrape before now, while you were Cousin Jacob's wife, and afterwards. You have my solemn promise."

"But you must *swear* to keep my secret. You must swear it on the Bible. Unless you take an oath—a solemn oath—and call upon God as the witness of your bond with me, I *dare not* tell you."

"I never took an oath in my life. I don't know how to do it. Besides, it is wicked—awful. Maud, I daren't do it."

"I would do it for you, Laura. It is not a crime that I have to reveal. Say what I tell you. There is a Bible in my room; let us go there and lock the doors; we shall be secure from interruption."

"Mr. Wreford may come home any moment."

"You must tell him I am ill, and wish to be alone. He can sleep in the bed that is prepared for you. Come, come! I must speak, or die: I am half mad now; if you won't swear, and listen, I may shriek it out to all the house."

Laura began to be afraid that Maud really was half mad, or even three-quarters. She tried to remember cases of sudden brain-fever of which she had heard, and she determined, if her friend's explanation was not quite coherent, that she would at once get her to bed and send for the doctor. She decided to take the oath. When they were safely shut into the bedroom, Maud took a Bible from the dressing-table, and placed it in Laura's hands. "Now kneel," she said, "and repeat after me:—'I, Laura Gresley, swear on the Holy Gospels, and in the presence of Almighty God, never to divulge the secret about to be confided to me by the woman I have known as Maud Wreford and Maud Russell. And so help me, God!'"

Laura was nearly as white as Maud when she rose from her knees. She was rather a bold young woman, but Maud's manner, and the oath she had taken, almost overcame her. Maud seemed now resolute and composed.

"I would not have done it for any one else in the world,"

sobbed Laura. "If you don't speak at once, Maud, I must go and leave you—oath or no oath. I did not swear to listen to you."

"But you must listen. Did you dimly guess what sort of shock I got to-night, while you were chatting about Alice Burgoyné?"

"Well! I am pretty sharp, you know. I guessed that you saw some one whom—you would rather not have seen."

"I think I would rather have seen Satan himself. I saw a man—who was standing up—a tall, shabby, evil-faced man, with long, loose hair and fierce, wild eyes. I think you saw him, too?"

"Yes, I did. And I should say he was a very bad lot, let him be who he may. What is he to you?"

"*My husband!*"

"Good gracious, Maud, you *must* be mad! It can't be, you know; you are telling crams—awful crams; you are making a fool of me, and considering what has just passed between us, I can't take it in good part. I feel as impressed as if I had just received the Sacrament. I am in no mood for jesting."

"I tell you, Laura, it is no jest. What I say is simply true. I would give anything but my soul to find it not true."

"But it cannot be, Maud; it is simply *impossible*. Besides, if that dreadful man were really your husband, what would Robert be?"

"What your cousin Jacob Russell was—not my lawful husband."

"Maud, you make me shudder. I am not a very good girl, I know, but I never did anything actually wicked; no one could talk scandal about me. And you said distinctly it was no *crime* that you had to disclose. And yet it seems to me that you have twice—*twice* committed bigamy! Why, the bad heroine in a bad novel could not do worse."

"Yes! I might be prosecuted for bigamy; I had not thought of that. But I am not so bad as you think me, Laura; I never guessed that *he* was still living. I had almost forgotten the miserable life I had led with him;

the past seemed only like a bad dream when I reverted to it. 'Of the great sin of which you accuse me, I am innocent as you are.'

"Still, there must have been a great deal of deceit. You married Cousin Jacob as Miss Bateman, whereas you must have been——"

"A widow, as I imagined; as it turns out now, a betrayed, deserted wife. Did it never strike you how little you knew of my antecedents previous to our first meeting at Dijon?"

"I don't think I thought much of it; I forgot. I remember mamma saying, 'Jacob is running great risks; he really knows very little about this handsome Miss Bateman. He marries her for her beauty; she takes him for his money; but how will it turn out?' As you have told me so much, Maud, you had better tell me the entire story."

"That is just what I am going to do. I remember myself first a child, living in the city of Bristol, with an old woman, whom I called aunt, but who, as far as I can ascertain, was no relation of mine. My mother, she said, was dead; my father travelled a great deal, and disliked children; he would never bother himself about me till I was quite grown-up. We lived in a very retired way—first of all in the city itself, and then at the Hotwells; but we were not short of money. My so-called aunt was not unkind to me; in some things she was over-strict, in others, over-indulgent; and she always laid great stress upon the acquirement of accomplishments, and took care that I should have every advantage in the way of music and dancing. I was always told that I was a beauty, that 'my face was my fortune,' and I was instructed to make the best of it. I understood from the very first that I was to make 'a grand match'; that money meant everything—happiness, pleasure, power, distinction, enjoyment of all sorts! I had naturally luxurious tastes, and I thought a great deal about dress; my great ambition was to be enormously rich, to drive in my own carriage, to have plenty of servants at command, and to wear feathers and diamonds. All this my aunt encouraged, telling me with such a face and figure, and plenty of cleverness, I might have all these, and even more.

" My education, of course, was extremely superficial, but I danced gracefully and played brilliantly, almost from instinct. I had also, in addition to a perfect musical ear, a fine contralto voice. Now and then, at rare intervals, came an aristocratic-looking personage, whom my aunt called 'the Colonel,' and who I began to suspect to be my father, though I never addressed him as such, nor did he ever speak to me or of me as his daughter. Generally some changes followed on these visits ; once we left Bristol and went to reside in London ; a year or two afterwards we removed to Paris—for my advantage, it was said. Till I was eighteen I attended a school in the Avenue de l'Impératrice, and then I thought it was high time that I should give myself up to more thorough enjoyment, and take the first steps towards that brilliant marriage which I quite believed to be my destiny."

" Did you know many people in London and Paris ? "

" Scarcely any. My aunt always said that when the right time came I should be properly introduced ; till then, 'the Colonel' wished me to remain in retirement and cultivate my natural graces. At eighteen I thought the time must be come. 'The Colonel' was supposed to be in India, killing tigers, or sticking pigs, or something of the sort. I was tired of waiting for him, and I became restive, and plainly told my guardian that I would wait no longer. I had been sought in marriage more than once in the usual French fashion ; but my aunt always discouraged my admirers, and frankly informed them that I should have no *dot*."

" Did you not reflect on the strangeness—the mystery even—of your situation ? "

" To a certain extent I did ; but that to which one has been accustomed all one's life seldom strikes one as exceptional. Moreover, I had great confidence in myself, and was more anxious for the future than careful about the past. I went on my way, reckless, frivolous—longing more and more for riches and distinction—when all at once came terrible news, the full import of which at first I failed to comprehend. 'The Colonel' was *dead*—killed by some accident in an elephant hunt. My aunt, I

remember, fainted when the tidings came, and when she revived she said, 'Matilda, it may be that we are ruined ; unless the Colonel has made due provision, we are left entirely without resources. I have a pittance of my own, it is true, but we are deeply in debt ; it is more than a year since I received remittances. Moreover, the trifles, such as it is, dies with me. I am old, my time can't be very far off, and then—what will become of *you* ?'

"What, indeed ! But did this Colonel make no provision ? "

"None whatever. At least, I never heard of any. Three days afterwards the poor old lady had a stroke, lingered for a week speechless and unconscious, then died, leaving me utterly alone and unfriended, and with only a few francs in my purse. I did not even know the Colonel's name, nor had I, to the best of my knowledge, any one in the whole world belonging to me—any one upon whom I could make a claim. I soon found that my guardian had spoken only truth ; before she was buried even, our landlady came forward with her 'little account,' which was not so 'little,' when it came to be inspected. We owed money all round, indeed, for I had been extravagant, not knowing that the usual supplies had failed, and, of course, not anticipating their entire cessation. Our creditors took all—everything they could lay their hands upon ; thus I became penniless, homeless, and friendless at a stroke."

"What a frightful condition ! I should have died at once. What did you do ? "

"After a while—in which interval I came almost face to face with starvation—I applied to my late governess, in the Avenue de l'Impératrice, and, by dint of importunity, I prevailed on her to take me in as supernumerary English teacher. Oh, Laura, what a life was mine ! I had been haughty, supercilious, disdainful ; I had regarded the teachers as quite inferior creatures, and one, whom I greatly disliked, I had treated with open contempt. Now, it was my turn to be despised, to be oppressed, to be set at naught by refractory pupils, to be defied and scorned by insolent children, to be lectured and taunted by harsh mistresses. I was quite as much of a *bonne* as a gover-

ness, and my services were sometimes claimed in the kitchen as well as in the schoolroom. My life was a bitter bondage—a cruel slavery."

"Why did you bear it? There are always plenty of situations open to accomplished women."

"Not such plenty! The governess-market has long been overstocked. Besides, if I left my principals they would give me no testimonials, and I could not hope to place myself without them. And as I grew older I learned more of the wickedness that is in the world. I knew what *might* befall me if I were left destitute in a great city, with no other dower than the beauty which was more likely to be my curse than my blessing. Beauty is too often a fatal gift to an unprotected, homeless, friendless girl. At last, however, after two years' servitude, a happy chance, so I thought, befell me, and circumstances brought me back once more to my native country. I obtained a situation as French teacher in a middle-class school at Stoke Newington, and I tried to be content. Alas! I soon offended my new mistresses—two cross-grained, narrow-minded, spiteful maiden ladies, whose ugliness of person was conspicuous. I dare say I provoked them; I was indiscreet, and I hated them and their close friend—an elderly English governess, who envied me my youth and beauty, and conceived a rooted aversion for me at first sight. I returned the sentiment with interest; I hated the whole lot of them. I dare say I was largely to blame, but they were cruel, malicious, brow-beating, tyrannical women."

"When I was utterly weary of my joyless existence, and utterly hopeless of any change for the better, I met that man—Stephen Mallory, if that, indeed, was his real name. I knew him under so many *aliases* after that I never felt certain of his genuine patronymic. It would be too long a story to tell you how he fascinated me; how I became—as I thought, poor fool!—desperately in love with him; how he imposed upon me, representing himself as a gentleman of noble but impoverished family, yet expecting, after a certain lapse of time, to inherit large possessions, as the undoubted heir of a kinsman with whom he had unfortunately quarrelled. I believed him implicitly; I

wonder now how I could have been so credulous, for his story would not in any way bear taking to pieces. Fraud and fiction were written upon the very face of it; had I been only a little less ignorant, a little less infatuated, I must have suspected his veracity."

"But, Maud, he looks so unlike a gentleman—so utterly disreputable! I would sooner throw myself into the arms of an honest dustman than trust myself to him."

"The honest dustman would be greatly to be preferred; still, Stephen was not then as he is now. Whatever he was, however, I trusted him; I was foolhardy, I suppose, and there was no one—save the women, whom I so detested—to consult. We carried on a clandestine correspondence for some little time, and then one day we were married at a church in West Hackney."

"Are you sure it was a legal marriage? Such a man would scarcely care to bind himself irrefragably."

"It was strictly legal in every respect. I have often wondered that he did not substitute some kind of mock ceremony. I might so easily have been duped. I have longed to find out some small illegality, some trivial omission; but long ago I satisfied myself that I was Stephen Mallory's lawful wedded wife. I could go to that church to-morrow and procure the certificate of my marriage, if I chose."

"And were you at all happy as Mrs. Stephen Mallory?"

"I might have been for a few days, for he seemed to be devoted to me, and I had escaped from a life of wretchedness. I can hardly say how soon suspicion stirred within me. Not to make a story of it, Laura, I found out, before I had been six months a wife, that I was married to a *thief*!—a swell-mobsman, I suppose you would call him; a burglar, a pickpocket, a cheater at cards, a wretch who, to all appearances, had sold himself out-and-out to the devil! By-and-by he threw off all disguise, and he proposed—he had the audacity to propose—that I should become his accomplice! that we should 'work together'!—that was his very expression. I was to make use of my beauty and accomplishments as means of decoy—as snares and pitfalls for the unwary. I refused, and he cruelly ill-used me; I had a spirit of my

own, and I retaliated. In vain he did his best to crush me, to reduce me to submission. I defied him ; he tortured me in every way he could think of ; he compelled me to associate with degraded women, with vile men, who knew what it was to pick oakum within prison walls ; with impostors and sharpers and tricksters of every degree. Sometimes we had plenty of money, and we spent it lavishly ; sometimes we came to an empty cupboard, a fireless grate, and our last halfpenny. But I need not detail my wretched experiences ; some of them were so horrible that I could not bear to narrate them, nor would you like to listen to them."

"And how long did you live this life of intolerable misery ? "

"Nearly three years—three awful years of crime, and shame, and vain writhings, and terrors that haunted me both night and day. Worst of all, he forced me on more than one occasion to criminate myself ; it was not his fault that I am not a convicted felon at this hour. At last came release ! We agreed to part ; but while I loitered simply to determine whither I should go, *he fled*, having just committed a tremendous robbery. He took with him every penny we had, everything that could be turned into money. He told me that he washed his hands of me ; I should never be his wife again ; he did not care what became of me ; I might go on the streets, or fling myself from a bridge, or—*go to hell !* Those were the last words I ever heard from his lips ; from that hour I never saw him again *till to-night.*"

"How long is it since all this happened ? "

"We parted about two years before I met your cousin, Jacob Russell. Fortune—or Providence, I ought to say—favoured me when once more I became free. By a lucky accident—a better woman than myself would say by God's mercy—I obtained a situation as travelling governess. I called myself Miss Bateman again ; I hated the polluted name of Mallory. I did my duty, I believe, and lived respectably and happily, in comparison with the past. Afterwards I was companion to a lady, who in course of time transferred me to a friend of hers, with the highest recommendations. With Lady Wrington I was

very comfortable ; she was a gay but kindly woman of the world, easy-tempered, generous, and pleasure-loving. She liked me, and we got on together admirably ; while travelling with her I received news of my husband's death in America. He was killed in a railway accident ; he was fully described, and mentioned by name. I at once wrote to ascertain particulars, and in due time learnt all that I wished to know. He was flying from justice when he met with his fate ; he was buried in a certain cemetery, with some other unclaimed victims, and the registered certificate of his interment—or a copy of it, rather—was duly forwarded. Can you wonder that I kept my own counsel, that I strove to blot out that most miserable epoch of my life ? that I determined to begin afresh as Matilda Bateman—to ignore for ever and ever the detestable name of Mallory ? ”

“ No, indeed ; I cannot wonder. I think I should have done the same myself. Of course, you then believed yourself to be a widow—you were free, as you say, to begin your life afresh. But how was the mistake made ? Or were you wilfully misinformed ? ”

“ That I cannot tell you, Laura. I know no more than yourself. I never once doubted the truth of the account —never even dreamed, till this most miserable night, that Mallory still lived.”

“ You are quite sure it is he ? ”

“ Quite. I looked the second time, praying that I might have erred. But Mallory's face is one that cannot be forgotten. My tale is told ; three months afterwards, I saw Jacob Russell ; the rest you know. Since then my life has been open to the world. I have been a proud, heartless, ambitious woman, and now God is punishing me for my pride, my deceit, my many secret sins, my long impiety. Oh, my God ! my God ! I repent ! Turn away Thine avenging arm. Oh, my God ! my God ! ”

Never had Laura heard Maud call on God before. Miss Gresley was by no means a religious woman herself, but she had often expostulated with her friend on the score of her absolute impiety. She was not even “ decently-respectably religious,” she used to say. Now Laura thought of the oft-quoted lines :—

"Ay, sooth, we feel too strong in weal, to need Thee on that road,
But woe being come, the soul is dumb that crieth not on 'God.'"

"And now, Maud, what will you do?"
"Do! what can I do? Oh, Laura, you will not betray me?"

"I will be true and faithful to you, Maud. Have I not sworn it on the Bible? And, if I had not, it would have been all the same. But—it is dreadful to say it—Robert is not your husband."

"Not in the sight of the law; but in God's sight I do believe he is. I married him in good faith, even as you might now marry any man who asked you. And what would be gained by confessing? I have not been a good wife to Robert, but I could not be so cruel to him as to let him know the bitter, shameful truth. That I had once lived with convicts, and almost shared their guilt! That I was not his wife! that our marriage was an empty form! that another man, who was of earth's veriest scum, might claim me any day! And Robert is so intensely proud of his respectability, of his unblemished name, of the position he has won. He to be the town's talk, to be pointed out as the victim of so awful a catastrophe, to have his 'case' discussed in club-houses, and in family circles, and in leaders of newspapers! It would kill him, or he would fly the country. No, no! he must never know it."

"You will live with a Damocles' sword for ever suspended over you. You will know no moment of peace; you will scarcely dare to show your face abroad; your miserable secret will kill you."

"Let it! But a secret—a dead secret—it must remain. Think of my boys, my innocent little ones! what are they?"

"I did not think of them! Oh, Maud, poor Maud, it is dreadful! Oh, if the secret can but be kept! He *may* never see you again."

"Did he see me? did he notice me? What was your impression?"

"It is of no use to deceive you; he did see you, and he tried to follow us."

Maud uttered a faint groan. Laura resumed : " But he was defeated in his purpose. We passed out swiftly from the stalls. He had to fight his way slowly out of the pit. He was not in sight when we drove away ; I watched carefully. He has seen you, and that is all. You *may* never meet him again."

" Or, I may meet him the next time I go out of doors. He will hunt me down now that he has so far tracked me. He will never rest till he finds me ; not for love's sake, but that he may torture me with his threats and importunities. He will try to extort money ; he will have no mercy. I shall wish myself dead a hundred times ! Suppose Robert had been with me to-night ! "

" My dear Maud, it is of no use looking on the dark side. Let us go to bed now. The storm is abating——"

" The storm ? Oh, yes ; it has been thundering and lightning since we came in."

" A most awful storm has passed over us. I never remember a worse. Why, we have been in one blaze of lightning, and the thunder has been shaking the house. Even now listen to the rain. For my part, I cannot talk any longer ; I shall have one of my furious headaches to-morrow as it is. I cannot offer you any more advice. I must think over what has happened ; I must sleep before I can reflect calmly. May God comfort you, Maud, and help you out of your sore trouble ; for the help of man is vain. Only God can save you ; pray to Him."

" As if *He* would hear *me* ! — I who have lived without Him all my life ! Listen ! " And Maud opened the Bible which still lay before her, turned over its pages for several minutes, then read —

" ' But ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would none of My reproof.

" ' I also will laugh at your calamity : I will mock when your fear cometh ;

" ' When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind : when distress and anguish come upon you. ' "

CHAPTER XLI.

"A VERY UGLY LOOK."

ROBERT did not return home at all that night, and Philip Rutland was with him when he came to dinner on the following evening. Maud had been upstairs all day, invalided, and Miss Gresley remained with her. "Do not urge me, Laura," said Mrs. Wreford, when her friend pressed upon her the expediency of dressing, and appearing as usual at the head of her table; "it is of no use, I cannot face Robert yet; I feel as if he would read my wretched secret in my face."

"The sooner you face him the better, Maud," replied Miss Gresley; "as you have decided that Mr. Wreford is to be kept in utter ignorance of the past, the sooner you rally your spirits and return to your accustomed ways, the easier your task will be. Nothing is to be gained by half-measures; you must either go straight through with this awkward business, or—you must leave it alone, and let things take their course."

"It cannot matter for one evening. You know we quarrelled last night; he will only suppose that I am still displeased."

"If you take my advice, Maud, you will not quarrel with Mr. Wreford any more, and you will lose no time in making Anne your friend. I tell you plainly, in your position, you cannot afford to have feuds, or even tiffs, with any one."

"As regards Anne, I shall make no further opposition; the fight is over. All the spirit is beaten out of me, and I care for nothing but to escape the doom that will always be hanging over me. I suppose I feel like a criminal whose death-warrant is signed and sealed, that it may be carried into execution whenever it may seem expedient—to-morrow—next week—next month—in a year's time; but, sooner or later—*some day!* Laura, it

can never be hidden—really hidden—this horrible fact—unless I die."

"I would not say that," returned Laura. "Of course, there will always be the greatest danger; but still there is just a *chance* that this man may never catch sight of you again, and he can have no means of tracking you. He does not know your name?"

"No. That is, I imagine he does not, cannot know it—at present. But Stephen Mallory is one not easily defeated; if he wants me—for his own purposes—and I am convinced he does—he will move heaven and earth to find me. He will hunt me everywhere; he will watch at every turn; he will haunt every place where I am likely to be found; he will be on the alert day and night till he gain his ends. Ah, I know Stephen Mallory! and the years that have elapsed since we parted have not softened his heart, nor rendered him less unscrupulous, though they have doubtless sharpened the edge of wits that were too keen and crafty always. Laura, as I looked at him I shuddered, for there was a devil in his face."

"I should think the devil and he must always have had a good deal in common."

"Always, or he could never have been so successful in crime; the father of lies must have helped him ever since he commenced his detestable career; and he will help him now to find me, though I go to the ends of the earth to hide myself."

"Don't be too hopeless; he cannot have much money at his command, or he would not cut such a lamentable figure. I should say he finds it no easy task simply to live, out of the workhouse. It must require all his ingenuity, too, to keep out of prison, and he is precisely the person on whom the police would keep a watchful eye, even if he were not already well known to them. And all this is against his schemes, and in your favour. It needs money to fee associates, to bribe accomplices, to appear at all sorts of places, in various disguises. If he were by any means wealthy, if he only looked a little less rascally, there are *Private Inquiry* offices that would cheerfully undertake his little job. As it is, we can scarcely suppose that any of these charming institutions would be

at his service. Detective work is always so expensive ! and in this case, most luckily so. No ! he must work single-handed and with empty pockets—both tremendous drawbacks, in such a difficult pursuit. And you—you must, of course, be on your guard."

"If it were not for this preposterous marriage of Anne's, I would not stay in London another day. In fact, I was making preparations for joining Emily Gateacre at Trouville, when Robert vexed me by the account of Philip Rutland's proposals. Now, I do not know what to do ; for the first time in my life, I feel mentally feeble and undecided. I cannot see my way, and, if I could, I dare say I should lack the courage and the energy to take it. The truth is, I am *bewildered* ; I have had a blow—a blow that has clouded my mind and paralysed my faculties, and—and—I don't in the least know what to do ! "

Maud spoke so piteously, so hopelessly, that Laura's eyes were full of tears, and she could scarcely find words to say that she would do all she could to help her, only she was afraid she was not very clever, and would be but a poor adviser. Yesterday, Mrs. Wreford had seemed to Miss Gresley the most enviable of all her acquaintances—rich, beautiful, and courted, with every luxury at her command, her husband only too indulgent, her friends too flattering, the stream of her life almost too serene !—her health perfect, her powers of pleasing unbounded, her reputation unsullied, her prospects cloudless ! And now—not for worlds would Laura have changed places with her. Her own lot—dull, and, in some sort, despicable as it seemed to her—was infinitely to be preferred to Maud's. She was sinking fast into hopeless old-maidism, and she was conscious of the waning of such charms as she possessed ; but how much better to be a respectable spinster with a limited income than a splendid, fashionable woman with *two husbands*, and a secret mine under her feet ready to explode at any moment ! How much better to live in a dull, back street, or in the stupidest Little Peddlington that ever existed, than on the vine-clad, sunny slopes of an unextinct volcano ! Rather the slums of St. Giles than the crater of Vesuvius.

But, till last night, Maud had been happily unconscious

of the skeleton under her roof ; if she had a "blue closet" at all, it was where she kept her unpaid bills, for Robert's liberal allowance from the first had not sufficed her. Or perhaps it was in her own mind, from whence she could not completely banish the bitter and degrading memories of the past, nor even a transient but oft-recurring uneasiness, lest one day her evil stars should bring her into contact with some one who had known her in her lowliest and most miserable estate. Now the grim skeleton threatened her and gibed at her saying, "Never, no never again, Matilda Mallory—whom the soft-voiced, smiling folk called Maud Wreford !—shall you escape from my loathsome presence ! Go where you will, strive as you may, I shall be always with you ! I shall be at your side when you drive in the park, when you listen to the strains of sweet music, when you mingle with the busy crowd, and when you are on your own peaceful hearth. I shall attend you when you caress your little ones ; I shall keep you waking and restless when all the world is sleeping ; I shall stand behind you when you bind the jewels in your hair ; I shall haunt you at home and abroad, by day and by night, in sickness and in health, in your brightest as in your saddest hours ; I shall never leave you till death comes to free you from your cruel bondage ; or, worse still, till, clothed anew with human flesh, I become an awful substantiality—no more a spectre, a mere dread ! but a terrible, living, unrelenting foe !—no longer a shadow, but Stephen Mallory himself, pitiless, remorseless, inflexible ! "

Laura, though she only partially comprehended the agonies Maud was enduring, wondered whether, under the anguish and the strain of thought, she would not go mad. There would always be that fearful shade before her, and there would be Robert Wreford, the man she had innocently wronged, who was *not* her husband, and whom she did not dare to disavow. How could she bear the ceaseless tension, the shame, the reproach, the miserable terror of suspense ? And Laura herself turned sick and faint at the remembrance of the secret she shared, and must share, till somebody died, or till the secret, blazoned in the face of a curious, astonished world, had

ceased to be one. She would have given much to go back to the dull, even tenor of yesterday morning, when a parental snub and her dressmaker's bill were the only things that really weighed upon her mind. The very organ-grinders in the street seemed to be droning tunes that said as plainly as the bells of Bow once said, "Turn again, Whittington," "Maud is not Robert Wreford's wife!" and the costly timepiece in Maud's boudoir ticked, "Ste-phen Mal-lo-ry! Ste-phen Mal-lo-ry!" as inexorably as Edgar Poe's raven chanted his dismal refrain, perched on the bust of Pallas.

She could not, however, persuade Mrs. Wreford to dress. "No," she said, decisively, at last; "*I cannot* go down; I dare not. I have not yet gained sufficient command over myself. I could not talk lightly of the weather and last night's storm—oh, heavens! what a storm! I could not even look at you without shivering like a guilty coward, and the silence that I must perforce keep would be unnatural. I might—I cannot tell—but I *might* go mad, and shriek out to Robert the awful thing that has befallen me. No; go down yourself, and meet my—meet Robert, and tell him that I am very unwell, that I am distracted with my head, that I am going to bed, and do not want to be disturbed. Make the best of it you can, and enjoy yourself; take my place at the table; try to forget for a little while the horrible tale you listened to last night."

After all, this was possibly the wisest course they could pursue, for it had begun to dawn on Miss Gresley's mind that her friend was scarcely to be trusted. A very little—a chance word, perhaps—might disturb the balance of Maud's tortured brain, and lead to irrevocable mischief. She reached the drawing-room just in time to welcome Mr. Wreford and Mr. Rutland, and to tender Maud's apologies. "You must put up with me," she said, in her usual coquettish way. "I am to take Maud's place, to give you your coffee, and to play for you if you like, and I hope you will both be on your best behaviour."

Robert mumbled something, Laura could not hear what; but she fancied she was rather rudely treated, and he was evidently bearing malice for last night's mis-

demeanours. He and Philip disappeared, and she sat listlessly turning over the new number of the *Grosvenor Magazine*, till the master of the house returned. His toilet had refreshed him, and he looked less unamiable. He spoke freely to Laura as he always did, for Maud and he were accustomed to spar and to squabble before her, making very little account of her presence at any time.

"What is all this?" he asked, rather roughly. "Maud gone to bed with the headache! I thought she never condescended to such petty ailments! *Hysteria* she can manage very happily, when she has any cherished point to gain; but what good can it do to shut herself up with the headache, unless, indeed, it be a new phase of the sulks?"

"Maud is not sulky, and it is very unkind of you to speak thus, when she is actually suffering. She really is extremely unwell, and could not come down. She has been poorly all day; she has eaten nothing, as Léonie can tell you."

"Oh, if she's off her feed there must be something amiss, I suppose! Give her a seidlitz powder, or one of your homoeopathic globules; a good sleep will be her best cure. Did you go out last night?"

"Yes; we used those stall-tickets, you know. We went to the Haymarket, and it was horribly hot and stifling in the theatre. We were both too tired to see the end of the play, and then the storm upset us—Maud particularly. I think I never saw such vivid lightning!"

"It was terrific; the electric fluid struck a house in Chelsea, and several persons, I hear, were killed on the other side of the water. You would be in it—in the storm coming home?"

"Not exactly; our early retreat was in our favour, though it both lightened and thundered all the way from the Haymarket."

"Has Maud said anything to you about this engagement between Anne and Philip?"

"Yes; she was vexed at first. I am sure I don't know why; but Maud is wilful, is she not? However, I do not think there will be any further difficulty. She is perfectly ready to receive Anne, as of course she ought to be! That little breeze has quite blown over."

"I am very glad to hear it; anything more unreasonable than Maud's prejudice against Anne cannot be conceived. But she must have changed her mind rather suddenly."

"Oh, I talked to her," said Laura, with her most patronising air. "I showed her the folly of her conduct. 'If you don't want Anne at home, why do you hinder her marriage?' I said. 'She cannot be kept at school permanently; already people are beginning to wonder why Mr. Wreford's daughter is not under her father's roof.' And I reasoned with her till she saw that she was only making herself ridiculous by opposing what she had no power to prevent. She will be as good as gold now, I promise you."

"I don't understand it; but I am too well satisfied to inquire into the whys and wherefores. I did not know you had so much influence, Laura; I did not believe that any one could turn Maud from her purpose, whether it were rational or the reverse. If she is not better tomorrow, though, I shall insist on her seeing Dr. Summers. I think I had better go and speak to her."

"Oh, pray do not; she is so feverish and nervous, that she is best alone—quite alone, with Léonie at hand if she wants anything. I think she will go to sleep if she is not disturbed, and, as you say, a good night's rest will do more to set her up again than any kind of medicine. She begged me to say 'good-night' for her. Oh, no! you need not be anxious. She will be all right in the morning."

And most devoutly Laura wished she might, while she dolefully feared the worst. The evening passed wearily for her, for the gentlemen only came to the drawing-room just before bedtime, and Robert would not have the piano opened lest Maud should be awakened. Depressed and worn out herself, after twenty-four hours of such agitation as she had never before known, she was thankful to retire, thankful to ascertain that Maud was really fast asleep, that all for that night, at least, was safe. Next day Maud rallied, and she moved about the house, and gave orders, and went to the nursery, and saw her dress-maker, but nothing could induce her to go out. She sat

behind the lace curtains all the afternoon, and watched the passers-by, herself unseen. Robert had visited her in the morning, before he left for business, and there had been a sort of reconciliation, and an exchange of kisses ; and it was "all made up between them," as people say. It was understood that Anne would be at home in a few days—in a fortnight at the farthest ; but she might just as well get a few things at *Worth's* while she was on the spot. Flora Emra was returning to England with her, and would stay first with them, if Maud did not object !

Oh, no ! there was nothing to object to ; and Robert seriously asked himself what this unwonted amiability might portend. Suddenly a bright idea struck Mrs. Wreford : she was longing to get away not only from London, but from England ; why should not she and Laura go over to Paris, and attend to Anne's *trousseau* there ? A little later they might refresh themselves at the German baths, or at one of the French watering-places, the quietest that could be selected. Maud felt instinctively that she was safest either in a great city or in some unfashionable resort.

"That is all very well," was Robert's reply ; "but what will Rutland say ? How is the courting to be carried on if he is in London and Anne in Paris, or on the coast of Normandy ? "

"Oh, they can court after they are married," said Maud, wearily. "Robert dear, I really am very far from well, and it is absurd to stay in London now, when every decent creature is out of it. I am positively dying for the sea ; London is killing me ; who does it not kill in September and October ? "

"Several millions of people, who are obliged to remain in it."

"Oh ! the common people, who have constitutions of iron, and nerves of gutta-percha. If it had not been for this wedding, I meant to have talked to you about Scotland. I had quite set my heart upon the Hebrides. And we might have crossed to Belfast, and seen the Giants' Causeway, or Killarney. But I *must* get away from London."

"And so you shall. You shall have a month on the

Continent, at least, and Philip must take his holiday with us."

So much settled, and peace restored, Maud began to feel rather more composed. It is wonderful how soon one becomes habituated to a state of things which, at first sight, seemed utterly unendurable. Maud did not the less realise her situation, but she became accustomed to the dread and pain of it, and as days passed by, and no thunderbolt fell, she began to hope that the whirlwind had swept by, and left her securely stranded—perhaps, for life. By common consent, she and Laura ceased to discuss the matter, but they had agreed that Maud was never again to appear in the dress she had worn that night at the theatre, and she was to adopt an entirely new *coiffure*, which, though less becoming than her old simple style, would greatly alter her general appearance. Laura even suggested that she should get her hair dyed, that her silken sable braids should be manipulated into a yellowish tow, or *blonde cendrée* ringlets. But that was not to be thought of, for Robert would never permit it.

Léonie, with immense complacency, dressed her mistress's locks in the new style, but could not but admit that Madame looked better in the exploded fashion; and Robert, the first time he saw his wife full dressed, declared that he scarcely recognised her; she looked quite unlike herself, and by no means so handsome as with her simple braids and massive coils, which, though a little out of fashion, suited her so perfectly! Maud was not sorry to be told that she was, to some extent, *unrecognisable*! It consoled her for the unbecoming *coiffure*, which her mirror told her was decidedly detrimental to her beauty; her own taste pleaded for the discarded braids and simple coils, prudence applauded the *frisettes* and the heavy plaits with which Léonie disfigured her stately, well-shaped head.

Anne was written to; her "papa and mamma" were coming to Paris immediately, also Miss Gresley. The *trousseau* orders were to be promptly given, and then they would all go to Fécamp, or some other quiet place on the coast, where Philip would join them. They would all return to England together some time in October. Rooms

were already bespoken, and Anne was to hold herself in readiness to leave the *Maison de la Tour* as soon as her family arrived.

So far, so good ! Maud and Laura, without referring to special exigencies, told each other that nothing could be better than these arrangements ; all that now remained was to put things in proper shape at home—the nursery establishment was to be removed to Hunstanton—and to make the needful preparations for the journey. Everything was nearly ready, and Laura's trunks were actually packed, when little Robin fell ill with one of those infantile maladies which make mothers and nurses anxious, though there may not be very much the matter ; while, on the other hand, the child *may be* sickening for measles, scarlatina, or even small-pox, if it happen to be in the neighbourhood.

"We shall know what it is in a day or two," said Maud. "I feel sure it is a mere feverish attack, such as children are subject to at this time of the year ; they have stayed in London too long, poor little mites ; I don't think that fortnight in May did them any good. Hastings does not suit some constitutions in warm weather. We must postpone our journey till Monday."

"If the child is not well enough to go to Hunstanton, I shall not leave home," said Robert gravely. "All things considered, Maud, I think we had better say Tuesday for ourselves, and then, if things go well, we can see the babies off for Norfolk before we start for Paris. If Robin is worse, of course it puts a stop to everything."

Maud could only assent, but her heart sank within her at finding that her plans were likely to be traversed. She had counted so much upon getting away from London at the time appointed, and she could not help regarding the inevitable postponement of the journey as an evil omen. Laura, too, was bitterly disappointed ; she had had a presentiment that something would happen to stop the delightful expedition, and she had been literally counting the hours till she should find herself actually moving out of the Victoria Station, her luggage registered for Paris, and herself bound for the Admiralty Pier at Dover. "Tiresome little thing !" she said to herself,

when she heard of Master Robin's indisposition. "I dare say he is going to have measles, and then, just as he is recovering, the baby will sicken, and so all our pleasant schemes will come to nothing ; and I am sure I want a change as badly as Maud. The sooner *she* is out of England the better ! "

And this was not said without good cause, for on the Wednesday morning, and this was Thursday, the journey being planned for Friday, Laura had been startled by meeting face to face the man she knew as Stephen Mallory, and he instantly recognised her, and made haste to follow her. She was out on a shopping expedition in Oxford Street, when, on the knife-board of an omnibus, stopping at the bottom of Orchard Street, she beheld the *mauvais sujet* of the Haymarket, and started as his strange, sinister gaze met hers. In another minute he was on the pavement, and she trembled lest he should address her. She went on quickly, but soon perceived that he was close behind ; she stopped to look into a shop window, partly to be sure that she really was the object of his pursuit, and partly to think how best she could evade him. If he tracked her home, it would be the first step to Maud !

Her course of action was quickly determined ; she made the best of her way to *Marshall and Snelgrove's*. Mallory would scarcely dare to follow her into the shop, and he could not watch *all* the entrances of that celebrated emporium. She knew the place well, and could find her way from one "department" to another without direction. She would pretend to have an appointment with a friend there, and remain in the mantle-room for some time, and then, having ascertained that the coast was clear, would make her exit by a Vere Street door, get into a cab, drive to the Underground Railway, and take a ticket for Clapham, where one of her most intimate friends resided. She could ill spare the time, and the friend was probably from home, but she could hastily devise no better way of giving the slip to her persecutor.

As she moved on, Mallory, who had examined the goods in the next window, coolly followed ; she took no notice, and pretended to be unconscious of his vicinity as

they walked almost side by side along the crowded pavement; for though the Row might be empty, and the Ladies' Mile a desolation, the number of pedestrians in busy Oxford Street was not perceptibly diminished. Arrived at *Marshall and Snelgrove's*, she entered as naturally as possible, and immediately addressed herself to the polite shopwalker near the door: Was not her sister, Mrs. Levitt, of Stamford Hill, in the mantle-room? Mrs. Levitt, with her five children, and the nursemaids, were safe at Dovercourt, as Laura knew quite well! The shopwalker, of course, had seen nothing of Mrs. Levitt, whom he knew very well; but would Miss Gresley proceed to the mantle-room, and ascertain for herself? This suited her well, and, looking back, she distinctly saw *Mallory* still near the door, apparently admiring some costly Indian scarves, and she determined that she would not show herself on that spot again. She stayed a reasonable time in the mantle-room, trying on a mantle or two, by way of improving the occasion; then she told the assistant she would go and look about her for a little while; she wanted to see the new costumes she had heard they were exhibiting, and she thought she must have some more gloves before she left town. If Mrs. Levitt came, she was to wait there for her. From costumes Laura flitted on to haberdashery, and thence to shawls, and thence to something else, till she came to a small side-door not very much in use, but with which she, as an *habitué* of the place, was quite familiar.

She had reckoned, however, without her host, for *Mallory* had calculated upon this move; either he knew the building as well as herself, or he had walked round and round the establishment, making himself acquainted with its exterior, and fixing upon this entrance as the one Miss Gresley would probably select for her departure. Happily, she caught sight of him at some distance, and from a point at which he could not by any means see her, and in a second she had turned about, and swiftly made her way to one of the Oxford Street doors before he could possibly get round to the front again. There was an omnibus just starting, and she hastily stepped into it watching all the while for the obnoxious figure, which

however, did not reappear. She breathed more freely as she got out at the Marble Arch, and, to her infinite relief, ascertained that she was not followed; and home was not far off. She was quite sure that she entered her father's house unperceived, for the street was empty, save for an organ-grinder droning out the beautiful but oft-desecrated, "*Ah! che la morte,*" and a woman with a basket of bouquets. She was glad to be safe at home, and sure that she had baffled the enemy; she was glad, too, that the Clapham journey had been spared her; and, above all, she was glad to reflect that within eight-and-forty hours she and Maud would be in the tidal train *en route* for Calais, every moment increasing the distance between them and this terrible man whom they so much dreaded.

Great, therefore, was Laura's consternation when she found the journey inevitably deferred. She was both annoyed and frightened, for now she began to fear that her presentiment "meant something." She concluded, however, not to say a word to Mrs. Wreford of what had happened in Oxford Street that morning; "but," said Laura, as she folded her best dresses, "it has an ugly look —yes, a very ugly look! I would give my new grenadine to be at this moment safe in Paris!" Next day her mother wanted her to go into Oxford Street again, but nothing could persuade her to stir a step in that direction. She felt convinced that Stephen Mallory would be on the prowl somewhere in the vicinity of *Marshall and Snelgrove's*.

CHAPTER XLII.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

THE reader will, perhaps, remember that Mrs. Wreford, when relating her history to Miss Gresley, mentioned a "middle-class school at Stoke Newington," where she had

for some time previous to her marriage with Stephen Mallory officiated as French governess. This school was kept by two maiden ladies, the Misses Cottle, aided by several teachers—*Mademoiselle Mathilde*, as Maud was called in those days; a cross-grained, vulgar-minded, but decidedly capable English teacher; and a miserable and much-oppressed elderly drudge, supposed to be related to, and dependent on, the principals of the establishment.

Ordinary school-keeping is by no means an ennobling occupation; and a schoolmistress, if she be not of the very highest type, is apt to be of a sordid turn of mind, and scarcely as conscientious in her dealings with pupils and parents as one devoted to the education of girls ought to be.

The Misses Cottle were of the lowest type of their order, and their chief aim was to make the largest possible amount of profit out of every scholar. Their terms were not high, but they professed to give a great deal for their money, and their prospectuses bristled all over with "unusual advantages." They spoke always of their "limited number of *young ladies*," but what that limited number was no one ever knew, as many pupils being admitted as the house would hold, while every dormitory was packed to suffocation. The "young ladies" were chiefly the daughters of inferior tradesmen, and some of them were paid for in kind instead of in cash—the kind, alas! being seldom, if ever, of the best. Curious-looking joints, as of deformed animals, constantly appeared at the Misses Cottle's board, suet dumplings of the kind commonly known as "stick-jaw," and rice puddings principally compounded of cheap rice and water, figured almost daily in their *menu*. There was soup sometimes, which the pupils stigmatised as "kettle-broth," or "*potage à l'eau*!" and plenty of coloured milk and water, supposed to be *tea*, and thick bread and Irish butter at the evening and morning repasts. Suppers were held to be unwholesome for young people, sugar was bad for the teeth, and pastry indigestible.

The girls learned by rote any number of lessons, and scribbled exercises till their fingers ached; they recited pages of "*Mangnall's Questions*," and whole columns of

“French Dialogue”; they thumped for hours together on wiry, dilapidated pianofortes; they drew impossible landscapes, and perpetrated flower-pieces enough to scare the busy bees; and once a week the dancing-master came, and the elder girls flirted with him to their hearts’ content. Who shall blame them? He was young and silly, and they had no other amusement except falling hopelessly in love with the curate of the church they attended.

But enough of the Misses Cottle’s “Select Establishment for Young Ladies.” The person with whom we have to do just now is neither Miss Cottle, nor Miss Anna-bella Cottle, nor the oppressed kinswoman, nor any of the luckless pupils, but Miss Knell, the English governess, who had been Maud’s bitterest and most implacable enemy all through the period of her residence at Stoke Newington. Why she so detested the friendless girl, it is difficult to say. Perhaps the fact of the younger woman’s grace and beauty at first sight displeased the coarse-featured, malignant spinster, who had passed more lustres than she cared to count. She was naturally envious and spiteful, and, not being gifted with good looks herself, she conceived a bad opinion of those who were more favoured. She had even come to believe that plainness of person and virtue were inseparable; while, on the other hand, she regarded beauty and even mere prettiness with grave suspicion. *Mdlle. Mathilde*—as the Misses Cottle christened Maud before her arrival, in order to impose her as a real Frenchwoman on the whole household—excited Miss Knell’s malignity in no ordinary degree. “A girl with such a face,” she averred, “must certainly be good for nothing except to lay traps for men and delude them to their ruin.” Maud quickly discovered the sentiments with which she was regarded, and returned them, as she said, with compound interest. With all a girl’s imprudence and with all the pride and warmth of a naturally imperious temper—sharpened by the peculiarities of her lot—she rashly entered on the fray, and disputed with her rival every inch of ground.

What could she expect? Nothing but defeat and mortification and incessant persecution, of course. Miss

Knell was all too strong for *Mademoiselle*; she *could* control her tongue, when necessary—*Maud* could not. *Miss Knell* was the friend and ally of the principals, and in their confidence; *Maud*, on the contrary, was in their black books from the very first, and was continually exciting some one's serious displeasure. The pupils were encouraged to rebel against her authority, then she was blamed for having no control over them; if she punished them, they complained of her at head-quarters; and they were her only associates, for *Miss Knell* disdained to converse with “such a creature,” and the drudge dared not show any sympathy towards one whom her tyrants decried. Every night *Miss Knell* and the *Misses Cottle* supped together in the private parlour, when savoury odours pervaded the house, generally followed by a fragrance as of spirits and hot water and fresh-cut lemons. At the same time *Mademoiselle Mathilde* and the drudge were regaling themselves on stale bread and cheese; the one correcting exercises on greasy slates, and the other with weak eyes painfully mending house linen or old stockings, in the desolate, bare schoolroom, by the light of one consumptive tallow-dip, in a greasy iron candlestick! Was it so very wonderful that the unhappy French governess, wearied of her hard lot, and driven to exasperation by frequent wrongs and cruel insults, should have listened to the tempter's voice? *Stephen Mallory*, in those days, was presentable, and *Maud* was inexperienced, and ready to embrace any means of escape from the thraldom which made her life a miserable burden. They first saw each other at a public lecture on *Astronomy*, which the pupils were permitted, or rather constrained, to attend; the whole school being taken at greatly reduced prices, while in the half-yearly bills the usual charge of half-a-crown for reserved seats was made, thus putting a nice little sum into the pockets of the *Misses Cottle*. “I cannot be worse off than I am,” thought poor, deluded *Mathilde Bateman*; and, within a few weeks of that first meeting in the Hall, she became *Mrs. Mallory*.

When her worldly property, consisting of one large trunk and a japanned bonnet-case, was sent to her, together with

a few shillings owing from her salary, a letter was enclosed from Miss Annabella Cottle, who was supposed to have a genius for epistolary correspondence, upbraiding the culprit as the "most unprincipled and shameless and worthless of her sex!" So much was said that Mr. Mallory threatened the virtuous spinster with an action for libel, and declared that if she "wagged her foul tongue any more," she should prove all her slanderous accusations in open court. This, of course, would have been most injurious to the schoolmistresses, especially as they had really nothing to urge against Mrs. Mallory except her clandestine marriage, which, of course, furnished a very bad example to the girls. They were forced in some sort to retract, and there, as far as the Misses Cottle were concerned, the association for ever ended.

Maud never saw them again, though, curiously enough, Miss Knell on several occasions crossed her path—that immaculate woman literally drawing back her garments lest they should be contaminated by sweeping against Mrs. Mallory's flowing skirts. But years rolled on, and both the Misses Cottle departed this life, and slept peacefully in Abney Park Cemetery; the old house in which they had for so long pursued their calling was pulled down, and a row of showy little villas erected on its site! What became of Miss Knell and the drudge Maud neither knew nor cared to know; though once again, soon after her marriage with Robert Wreford, she saw the former in the street at Hackney. What was now Maud's astonishment, when, being summoned to the drawing-room to speak to some person on business, she found there her ancient enemy!

"I dare say you are surprised to see me?" said the spinster, whom age did not seem to have improved either in looks or in general deportment. She was very shabbily attired in the rustiest of mourning, and there was about her a general air of poverty and destitution. She was evidently a decayed *something*, though by no means a decayed gentlewoman; for she had never in her palmiest days been even an imitation gentlewoman.

Maud at once conjectured that she had sought her out in order to supplicate some kind of charity of her.

"Yes," she replied coldly, "I am *extremely* surprised to see you, Miss Knell. I thought we were strangers to each other, and that by your own desire. I do not think I have anything to say to you."

"Oh, Mrs. Wreford," sighed the quondam governess, "I was a foolish woman, proud and vain, in those sad, sinful days. I have learned better since then; my pride has been humbled, and I have come down in the world. Yes, I have come down, and you have got up; you are rolling in riches, while I, who once enjoyed a competency, can scarcely scrape enough together to keep myself alive. I assure you, Mrs. Mallory—I beg pardon, *Mrs. Wreford*—my very existence is a struggle—a hard struggle, too."

"I am sorry to hear it; but it is really no affair of mine."

"Ah, Mrs. Wreford!—Mrs. Mallory—dear me; how stupid I am!—you are called Mrs. Wreford now, are you not? Well, I think we should all, as Christians, forget and forgive. I, for my part, am quite ready to let bygones be bygones. Let us have a little talk about old times! You know my dear friends the Cottles are both gone to heaven, and poor Louisa (the drudge) is in a lunatic asylum. I always thought there was something a little queer about her. Well, one day, all of a sudden, she went raving mad, and tried to murder me—*me*, the best friend she ever had, unhappy girl! And dear Miss Cottle and dear Annabella had terrible losses just before they died, and the school literally came to nothing; they left the goodwill of it to me; but, bless you, it was not worth sixpence! I quitted the place; I couldn't bear it after those two dears were in their graves, and I kept a little day-school in Seven Sisters' Road; a few pence a week each pupil, and manners twopence extra! Ha! ha! I always liked my little joke, if you remember! I am still in the neighbourhood of Holloway; but oh, dear Mrs. Mallory—Mrs. Wreford, I mean—it's a hard matter in these days for a single woman to make both ends meet, and I'm behind with my rent, and may have my bed taken from under me at any moment, and I owe a nine months' stationer's bill, and am threatened with the county court, and can't as much

as get a slate pencil or a twopenny copybook on credit. Yesterday, when the stationer—wretched man!—sent me the rudest note, and there was a message from the milk to say it wasn't coming any more, the thought of *you* came into my mind. I knew you had lost poor Mr. Mallory, and married again *most advantageously!* and I said to myself, 'She was always open-handed and generous; it's a Providence I thought of her; I'll go to her to-morrow, and I know for the sake of old times she'll befriend me.' And you *will* help a poor, lone woman who has seen better days, and is getting in years, and a martyr to the rheumatics—won't you now, Mrs. Mallory?"

"I will thank you not to call me by that name," said Maud, haughtily; "what do you want?"

"That's not a nice, delicate way of putting it. If you came to me now, and you were poor—as you used to be, you know—and I was as rich as people say you are, I shouldn't ask point blank what you wanted; but I should just slip a bank-note or two—say, one twenty pound, or two tens—into your hand, and whisper, 'Will that be of any use to you?'"

"I am quite sure you would do nothing of the kind. Judging from your conduct in former days, I should expect to be given in charge to the police as a vagrant if I begged of you. Again, I ask you, what *do you want?*"

"Twenty pounds really would set me straight, and you would never miss it."

"I have not at this moment £20 in the house, and Mr. Wreford is from home; we pay all our bills with cheques."

"A cheque will do as well as notes. My landlord would cash it for me."

"I will give you what I have—two five-pound notes, and two sovereigns." And Maud felt glad to think she had forgotten to tell Robert that morning that her private purse was getting low.

"I shall for ever bless you! It does me all the good in the world to see your face again—handsomer than ever, too! Ah, what it is to have plenty of money! That means plenty of everything, don't it?—except, perhaps, peace of mind. If you would give me a glass of wine

now, and a crust of bread ! I'm that sinking I could faint at your feet. I'd nothing of a breakfast, and I've walked every step in this hot sun from Holloway."

Maud rang the bell and ordered in the wine and biscuits, lest the fainting fit should be accomplished ; but she quickly regretted her hospitable impulse, for after the second glass of Robert's excellent port, her unwelcome visitor became disagreeably talkative, and was evidently inclined to postpone her departure. And all the while Maud's heart was sinking within her, for a horrible suspicion had seized upon her mind—what if this woman were an emissary of Mallory's ! Why had not Miss Knell sought her out before, if this tale of destitution were not a mere pretence ?

" How did you know where to find me, and how did you ascertain my present name ? " she said coldly, while her guest crunched an almond-biscuit, and looked longingly at the decanters.

" Nothing easier," replied Miss Knell, instantly ; " I have old friends at Stoke Newington, of course, and that's not quite a hundred miles from Hackney ; and when I saw you there—near upon three years ago, to the best of my recollection—I naturally made inquiries, and found out all about you."

Found out all about her ! Maud shuddered, and hoped it was a mere figure of speech. She poured out a glass of wine for herself, and drank it off like nauseous medicine, in the hope that the stimulant might give for the moment the nerve and the courage she so much needed. Miss Knell, who was watching her much as a cat, with pretended *nonchalance*, watches her fated prey, resumed, " Yes, I made inquiries, and heard you were just married to a Mr. Wreford, a widower, and a very rich man. The funniest thing was they said you were a *Mrs. Russell* before you became Mrs. Wreford. Says I, ' That can't be, for to my certain knowledge her first husband was a Mr. Mallory—*Stephen Mallory* ! ' He wrote letters to poor Annabella, you know, after your elopement. But they only laughed, and said I must mean some other person ; but I was right, wasn't I ? You were not *Mrs. Russell* ? "

"Yes, I was. I married Mr. Russell soon after I heard of—of Mr. Mallory's death."

"Well, I never! And so you've really had *three* husbands! Some women are in luck; they can marry as often as they please, and some can't get a husband at all! Not that it was my case—I might have made several most eligible matches, but I never yet saw the man for whom I could have sacrificed my freedom. Some women have too high a standard, and I was one of them—more's the pity, I think sometimes, when I remember how solitary I am, and how old age is creeping on. I wish now—*sometimes*—that I had accepted one of the numerous suitors who wooed but could not win me in my youthful days. An old maid, friendless and poor, is apt to be despised."

"That depends entirely on the old maid's conduct, I should think," Maud could not help replying. She was growing desperate, and yet she dared not ring the bell, and desire her servant to "show this person out." It was many a year since Maud had confessed to herself that she *dared not!*

"It's an unfeeling, selfish, Mammon-worshipping world," sighed Miss Knell. "I'll take just half a glass more, if you please, Mrs. Mallory, and a *leetle* slice of that pound-cake. I'll help myself!" and she filled her glass up to the brim. Maud began to be alarmed for the consequences; she dreaded lest her visitor should become intoxicated, and leave her house actually "drunk and incapable."

Miss Knell sipped at her wine, and cut off a fine wedge of the cake; then she continued:—"I don't think one woman ought to be allowed to have *three* husbands when we know that there are ever so many more women than men in the world. If we were all Venuses and heiresses there wouldn't be a husband apiece for us; and when one lady snaps up *three*, it's a shame! It's as bad as the woman of Samaria, and she ended in being no better than she should be."

"But I left Hackney two years ago," said Maud, wishing to return to the subject of her present residence, and to ascertain how Miss Knell had discovered it.

"Of course you did," was the reply; "and of course you left your new address at Ivyside, and with some of the tradespeople. I had only to ask and be answered. You didn't want to hide yourself, I suppose! I might have called upon you long ago, but I didn't, and that's all about it. And there's a Mr. Cottle, a sort of cousin—only he don't care to own it—of my departed friends, Martha and Annabella—and I've seen him once or twice, having little favours to ask of him, for he's a bachelor, and has lots of money, and *he* knows *you*, I think. He said when I asked him that he had that honour, but that he knew *you* chiefly through the Gresleys—very old friends of his."

"Yes," said Maud, slowly, "there is a Mr. Cottle who is very intimate with old Mr. Gresley, and I have met him sometimes, but it never occurred to me that he might be related to the Stoke Newington Cottles; in fact, I had almost forgotten them—I did not care to remember the miserable days I once passed under their control."

"One gets reminded of things sometimes quite against one's will, don't one?" was the reply, with a very perceptible sneer. "Well! I think I'll go now, and thank you for all favours. Now we've renewed the acquaintance, I hope we shall see more of each other: there's no friends like old friends, is there?"

"I never had any *friends* in old time."

"When people are young they don't know their friends, Mrs. Mallory. I dare say you didn't know yours, more than another girl, and you took them that made you do your duty and kept you under for your enemies. But do tell me now, when did Mr. Mallory die? I'm interested in *him*, you know; his very name recalls happier times. You were sly, you two, courting as you did, and then going off and getting married without a word! He was a fine young man, I remember; what was it took him off?"

"Really you must excuse me, Miss Knell; it is a very painful subject. I am ashamed when I think how foolishly I acted. I do not defend my conduct, nor do I wish to be reminded of it. Of course, the Misses Cottle had a right to complain of me. I ought not, at any rate,

to have eloped from their house—if you choose to call that most imprudent act an elopement; but they are dead, and it all happened years ago. I will thank you to say no more about it."

"Well, I won't; but I wonder what poor Mr. Mallory would say if he heard you! I always thought first love was *the* love of woman's life. Though perhaps he was not your first love,—perhaps there was somebody else in France? And so he died in America—your first husband?"

"Who said so?" asked Maud, quickly, instantly remembering that she had mentioned nothing of the kind.

"I don't know, I am sure; but I *did* hear Mr. Mallory was killed, or *said* to be killed, in a railway accident on the Grand Trunk Railway. Of course, you took care to ascertain that his death was a fact, not a simple rumour?"

"Of course I did. I have the certificate of burial."

"Oh! that was right. One cannot be too prudent. Such queer things do occur every now and then, don't they?—dead people coming alive again! and fortunes left you when you least expect them. Life is a romance, nothing less than a romance! What do you say?"

"That I cannot enter into the subject now. One of my little boys is ill, and I am anxious to return to the nursery. I must beg you to excuse me."

"I didn't know; I'm sorry, I'm sure, to have kept you so long from the little darling. And so you have children?"

"Is that anything remarkable? Yes, I have two boys; and the eldest, I fear, is sickening for measles, or scarlatina; and—oh, there is the doctor! Now I *must* bid you good morning, Miss Knell."

And Maud, sick and faint as she was, felt something like rapture as the door closed on her persecutor. But, oh! what did it all mean? Who sent the woman with her tale of poverty, which probably was but a blind, an excuse for seeking the interview? Had she and Stephen Mallory met, and were they in collusion? How could she possibly know anything of that railway accident, as connected with him, unless he had informed her?

For a little while the child absorbed her attention. The

doctor pronounced him very ill, with unmistakable scarlatina, and it was of no use to send Freddy away, as the same symptoms had already begun to declare themselves in him. There was, however, no immediate danger, only very careful nursing would be required, especially as regarded the baby, whose throat and chest were exceptionally delicate. Of course, there could be no going to Paris now—no going anywhere for some weeks to come; and Anne must be written to, and the rooms engaged at the hotel must be given up. Nor could Anne come home in the present state of things; her father and her lover would both forbid it; and Laura, too, she would certainly be afraid of the infection. Thus Maud's whole world seemed suddenly turned upside down, and she felt like one stunned, as, through all the dreary, hot afternoon, she sat rocking the sick child on her lap, and croning an old ditty that seemed to soothe his restlessness.

Little Robin slept at last, and then his miserable mother was free to think of her own more personal anxieties. The more she reflected the more certain she became that Miss Knell was an emissary of Stephen Mallory's, though how the two had come into contact she could not guess. It did not matter; they had combined to bring her to ruin and disgrace, and that was enough for her to know. Should she confess to Robert? Should she tell him of the horrible trouble in which she had involved him? She had not, she tried to think, guiltily deceived him; she had only blotted out a portion of her past life. He had known her as Maud Russell, *née* Bate-man; and Jacob Russell, though he had had good reason to be displeased with her behaviour in several instances, had no idea but that she lawfully bore her maiden name when he gave her his at the marriage altar.

But no! she could *not* tell Robert; she could not bring herself to confess the miserable truth, which she had hoped and believed was for ever dead and buried. How could she begin the miserable story! how acknowledge the fraud she had practised on Jacob Russell as well as on himself! She had not told more falsehoods than she could help; she had said as little about herself as possible, though more than once Robert had had a curious fit and

questioned her as to her early days. She had said that she was an orphan, left in charge of her grand-aunt, and that she was educated for the most part in Paris; she never knew her parents,—which was true enough; and her father—a military Colonel—died rather suddenly in India in most embarrassed circumstances. When she mentioned this, Robert had remarked, "You must have been entitled to a pension under any circumstances." To which she replied, on the spur of the moment—for the pension was a new idea—"He sold out—don't you call it that?—several years before his death. He was a very gay man, I believe, and always in a state of impecuniosity; but I really knew very little about him."

Lady Wrington had taken care of her after her old aunt died, and had brought about the marriage with Mr. Russell, regardless of the disparity in age and of her own feelings, which were strongly against the union. All that she said about herself, if not exactly the truth, was based upon it. She was only silent—absolutely, impenetrably silent—as to the years that elapsed between the supposed aunt's death and her own entrance into the family of Lady Wrington, who had, indeed, treated her rather as a daughter than as a hired companion. She ignored the whole of her governess-life, from her first engagement in the Avenue de l'Impératrice, to her final situation as "friend" to a half-educated heiress, who wished to travel before she made her *début* in society. The heiress had given herself and her large possessions to a Russian nobleman; Lady Wrington was dead; Mr. Russell's son had had some inkling of Maud's relations with some gentleman prior to her marriage with his father, and as he violently resented the whole affair, he was anything but friendly with his beautiful young step-mother, and openly declared himself inimical to her interests. Nevertheless, she knew that he would never utter a word to her disadvantage, now that she no longer bore the name of Russell; besides, his suspicions, though highly derogatory, were very far removed from the truth. He would have pitied rather than despised her had he known the exact state of the case.

And as time passed on, and she never saw any one who

knew aught of that secret history—save, indeed, at rare intervals and by chance, Miss Knell—she felt herself quite secure. The Gresleys knew nothing but what she had chosen to tell them ; she had destroyed every scrap of paper that could by any possibility have compromised her, either as Mrs. Russell or as Mrs. Wreford ; and, lastly, she had almost forgotten the name of Mallory, which had never been uttered by her since her resumption of her maiden estate, nor written, save when it was necessary that she should certify the news which she received from America. Especially for the last two years had she triumphed in her position. She had said to herself that her mountain stood fast, that she should never be moved ! And lo ! sudden destruction and a horrible snare, from which there was no escape ! In the midst of peace and prosperity had come the storm ; in the morning there was no shadow on her horizon—no ! not so much as a cloud like a man's hand ; and ere midnight the heavens had gathered blackness, and the thunder-bolt had fallen, withering all her joys and blasting for ever all her happiness.

And again, as she caressed her boy, and watched his disturbed slumbers, she said to herself, “ I cannot ! I cannot tell him ! He will know ; he may know any day, any hour ! for those creatures have me in their net. Yet they *might* be bribed to silence ! That man does not want *me* ; and if I can find him gold enough, he may think it worth his while to keep the secret. And Robert is really my husband in God's sight ; only a quibble of law would nullify that ceremony with him. Besides, I could denounce Mallory—I could send him to penal servitude for life ! and I *will*, if he do not let me alone ! But, oh !—I shall never—never hold up my head again—no, never more ! ”

And then Maud remembered how it was written—“ Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall ! ”

How were the mighty fallen !

CHAPTER XLIII.

D A Y S O F D A R K N E S S .

It was the last day of September, and Mr. Wreford was sitting at five o'clock in the afternoon in his private room, when Mr. Long, as on a former occasion, knocked at the door and respectfully inquired if Mr. Philip Rutland might be admitted. "Mr. Rutland? Oh, yes, certainly," was the reply; "the very person I wished to see. Tell him to come up, Mr. Long."

Robert had been sitting for the last two hours busy with some complicated accounts, which, like a weary schoolboy's sum in Long Division or Rule of Three, refused to come right on any terms whatever. And yet he was a very athlete at figures, and prided himself upon his quick comprehension of even the most mysterious and complicated monetary accounts. He sat, surrounded by books and letters and invoices and memoranda, and whole sheets of private calculations lay before him on his blotting-pad. He looked hot and weary and dispirited, and from time to time he passed his hand across his brow, as though to clear away some mistiness of vision, or, perhaps, drowsiness of brain. He really seemed glad of an excuse to lay down his pen, when Philip Rutland was announced.

Philip was evidently more at home than when we last saw him at Fenchurch Street. He seated himself without invitation, and stirred up Mr. Wreford's pet cat, which lay stretched out, like a defunct Grimalkin, on the soft, glowing Persian carpet. "Well! I brought them safe home last evening!" he said. "I can scarcely tell you how delighted Anne was to find herself on English ground again!"

"She is at Sevenoaks, I suppose?"

"Yes, with my father and my aunt; and Nellie will be back from Dovercourt to-morrow, if not to-day. Flora is such a little Frenchwoman, that she has half-forgotten

her native tongue, and speaks it with a decided accent. But how is the little boy?"

"The doctor thought him much better yesterday, though still he was, or seemed, apprehensive of another relapse. It appears that this sort of fever is very loth to take its final departure. The attack has lasted nearly a month with the poor little fellow, and he is as weak as a day-old babe; it made short work with the other child."

For baby Freddy, who sickened a day or two after his brother, was lying quietly under a little mound in Kensal Green Cemetery. The fever had seized him in its hot and fervent grasp, and the tiny life, with scarcely a struggle, had withered away as rapidly as the tender leaves and buds of some graceful water-plant shrivel and die in the noontide sunshine, when denied their native element. It was "the throat," they all said; he had no chance from the very first; and within a period of five days he was dancing and crowing in his nurse's arms—"as lovely an infant as one would wish to see"—and sleeping in his little coffin, covered with autumn-flowers, all ready for the grave. It had been a sad month for Robert and for Maud, and both of them had private anxieties apart from their parental concern for the sick children. What Maud's troubles were, we know well enough; Robert's were quite of another nature, and they touched others besides himself.

"I had some little trouble in persuading Anne to remain at Sevenoaks," resumed Philip; "she wanted to come right off this morning, and take her share of the nursing."

"She must not dream of such a thing! She had scarlet fever when she was a child, but so mildly that we all thought it was only a bad feverish cold, till the doctor assured us to the contrary. She would not be safe from infection. Tell her that I desire her not to think of going near the house. I am sure Mrs. Markham will take care of her."

"Of course she will; besides, Anne is one of ourselves now. Her proper place, in the present state of affairs, is in my father's house. How does Mrs. Wreford keep up?"

"I hardly know how to answer you. She does keep up, bravely; but I should not be surprised at any moment

if she suddenly gave way. I never saw anybody so terribly altered in so short a time; she is worn to a shadow, and she takes nothing at all. She seems to have given up both children from the commencement, and she is still altogether hopeless. She scarcely stirs from the nursery. Little Freddy died in her arms, and ever since she has devoted herself entirely to Robin. To tell the truth, I had no idea that my wife was so intensely maternal."

"You are not looking well yourself, Mr. Wreford."

"I am not feeling well, Philip; my head aches, and I am miserably tired. I fancy I took cold the other day when the weather turned chilly so suddenly. And naturally I am depressed. I did not think one could feel the death of a mere baby so acutely. Poor little fellow! he suffered cruelly with his throat. Well! he is better off; no more pain nor trouble for him. I suppose we ought to rejoice! But it's hard to lose one's children—no one knows how hard till the parting comes. I do trust Robin may yet be spared to us, but he is very weak; he has evidently not much rallying power. It's a sad world!"

And Robert—the prosperous, envied Robert Wreford—actually brushed away a tear, and looked as if, at any rate, the world was sad enough just then for him.

"You are not worrying yourself about these failures, are you?" said Philip. "Do they touch you at all?"

"Not to any extent; there is no present inconvenience. But failures such as these are highly dangerous; one failure begets another, and I have heard rumours about Tollerson and Co. Worse still! Long tells me there were whispers on 'Change to-day of something shaky at Drumlees'!"

"Whew! anything rotten there would be a real calamity! You mean the Bank, of course?"

"Yes; the Bank—'Drumlees Brothers!' But Peter Drumlees, the merchant, would go with the Bank. And if Drumlees' went, to say nothing of Tollerson's, nothing, I am confident, could save Prendergast's; there are so many in that boat, that there *must be*—well, something not very far removed from universal smash!"

"When I heard of that American house at Birmingham, I said to my father, 'We are going to have bad times.' And he replied, 'I shall return thanks to heaven if we are not in for one of those business panics that shake the whole commercial world twice or thrice in the lifetime of every man.' And for once I felt sorry to reflect that the governor is generally pretty correct in his previsions. Tollerson's wouldn't hurt us materially, and Drumlees' not at all, except indirectly; but if Prendergast's stopped payment, we should have a fight for it. I don't mind telling *you*."

"It would be a fight with a good many," said Robert gloomily. "To myself it would be a most serious inconvenience. I hold a good bit of their paper, worse luck."

"Prendergast's bills have always been as good as Bank of England notes. We must keep our eyes open, or we shall be among the breakers before we know which way the wind blows. But I don't mean to worry; I shall trust to Providence, and steer to the best of my ability. Things may not be as bad as they seem; or they may right themselves, as I've known them to do, in the course of a few hours."

Here Mr. Long tapped at the door, and without waiting for an answer walked in. He shut the door behind him, advanced to where the two gentlemen were sitting, and said solemnly, addressing his master, "It's all up with Tollerson's, sir; their bills are waste paper; and Drumlees' have stopped payment—they put up the shutters half-an-hour ago."

Robert, already pale, turned of an almost deathly hue, while Philip looked gravely anxious. "Are you sure, Mr. Long?" he asked.

"Only too sure, Mr. Rutland. It's a *panic*, as sure as fate! I dread to see to-morrow's papers. If Prendergast's goes—as go it must now—I am afraid it will sweep down a lot of other houses with it; and when once a calamity of this sort happens, it's hard to say when and where it may end. I'm an old man, and I've been through two panics in my time, and as sure as my name is Ebenezer Long, we're going to have another, or, rather, we have it, and the downfall of Tollerson's and Drumlees'

may be regarded as the first act in a tragedy that must be played out among us, whether we like it or no."

"There, that will do, Long," interrupted Robert, irritably, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, and taking a draught of iced-water. "You are a Job's comforter if there ever was one! We had better, all of us, I think, call our creditors together, and so spare ourselves the inevitable death-agony. Let's report ourselves defunct at once, eh, Rutland?"

"Not if I know it," replied Philip. "Our house is more than a century old, and it never yet has failed to meet its obligations. We had a hard pinch in 1848, I know; but we struggled through, in spite of difficulties, not owing a single halfpenny. And my father and I will fight the battle over again, if need be. Courage, Mr. Wreford! it's not like you to be downhearted."

"It's the trouble at home," said the old clerk, respectfully. "I lost two little lads myself, once, and I know how it feels. It knocks a man down when such trouble comes, and it makes him look on the black side of life." And with a mournful shake of the head he slowly retired, muttering to himself, however, as he passed to his own quarters, "I don't like the look of things! I don't, indeed! Pray the Lord, Prendergast's may keep its head above water! I wonder if Mr. Wreford has had the fever, now! He ain't himself at all, at all."

Next day Robert came to business rather later than usual, and he had scarcely arrived when various friends and associates demanded admission, intent on talking over their affairs and taking counsel with one whose judgment was pronounced by his compeers to be always of the soundest. But they were disappointed, for Mr. Wreford exhibited none of his wonted sagacity; his usual keen insight into business seemed to have deserted him; he was ominously taciturn, and he seemed wearied of everything and everybody, his visitors included. It was afternoon before he was alone, and then, when he tried to read his letters, the characters swam before his eyes, and he sought in vain to comprehend the contents; but the general impression he received was of evil from all parts of the country. Failures and stoppages were reported from

every quarter, and old-established houses, both in town and country, were said to be tottering to their fall. Then he called in Mr. Long. "I cannot possibly answer my letters, Long; my head is so bad, worse than yesterday! Will you look them over, and reply to those that require an immediate answer? I know I can trust you."

"To be sure you can, Mr. Wreford; it would be a terrible shame if you could not, after all these years. I'll do my best." And as he spoke he glanced over several sheets which his master had thrust into his hand. "Dear me," he said; "this is very bad. The country is in a very precarious state. The Old Bank at Burnhampton gone! —that means the closing of at least three more banks in the same district. If Prendergast's will but keep up, and Sims and Sykes'! If *they* stand, *we* shall have a chance!"

"Have you heard anything of Prendergast's?"

"Their cashier was in here this morning, and I tried to pump him; I thought he might let out a word to me, as we are very old friends, but he was as silent as the grave. Only, when I asked him how things were going in Thames Street, generally, he shook his head, and said, solemnly, 'Nothing but clouds, Mr. Long, and very dark clouds, too!' And then he began about the *vials* in the Revelation, one of which had to be poured out this autumn, he said; and we were on the verge of the fifth or sixth '*woe!*' —I forgot which. He's a sort of Millenarian, you know, or Latter-day Saint, or something. He's got *Daniel and Revelation on the brain*."

"And I've got misery on the brain, I think," said Robert wearily, dipping his handkerchief in the tumbler of water that stood at his side, and laying it on his head. "I never had such a headache in my life; it's enough to drive one frantic. And I'd no refreshing sleep all last night; I did sleep, I know, for I had such horrible dreams, so intensely real, that they seemed to go on even when I awoke, and knew that I was in my own bed. My throat burns too, and water won't cool it. Long, I am terribly afraid I am going to have the fever."

"I am afraid you are, Mr. Wreford; I feared it yesterday when you were talking to Mr. Philip Rutland. Now do you go straight home, and see the doctor before

you're worse. There's nothing like taking those things in time. I'll do my best, sir, my very best; except a few private matters, I know all the ins and outs of the business, I believe; and though I haven't your judgment, nor your wonderful far-seeingness, I have plenty of experience, and a plodding industry that has served me well, instead of cleverness, before now. And I think —nay, I'm sure I am to be *trusted!*"

"I am sure you are, Mr. Long. I'll take your advice, for I don't think I can hold up much longer. It is of no use poring over the books; it is as much as I can do to remember that twelve pence go to a shilling. And you had better telegraph for my brougham; I could not bear either train or cab to-day."

"Yes, sir." And Mr. Long went himself to the nearest office, and telegraphed to Mr. Prance not only to send the brougham, but to take care that the doctor should be in attendance when Mr. Wreford reached his home. "For he'll be delirious before midnight, or my name is not Ebenezer Long," said the clerk, as he scribbled the telegram; "and I'm afraid—sore afraid—it will be many a day before he shows his face in Fenchurch Street again."

Then Mr. Long returned to his master, intent on gaining such instructions as could be given. It was not possible, however, that he could learn much. In the first place Robert was too ill to think clearly for two consecutive minutes, and, in the second, the whole commercial atmosphere was so befogged, and the confusion of ordinary business processes so extensive, that the clearest and keenest mind could not have given orders that might not be a dead letter on the morrow. On such occasions one can never guess, much less say, what a single day may bring forth.

Robert showed his perfect confidence in his faithful servant and friend by handing over to him the keys of his private desk, and signing, at his request, several blank cheques, to be applied as exigencies might demand.

"You think I may not be able to sign a cheque to-morrow?" said Robert, with a ghastly smile.

"It is just possible, you know, sir, and it won't do to be pleading illness, or anything else, at such a moment.

I shall try to provide for the crisis that must ensue if Prendergast's come to grief. I am afraid it's shaky, but what firm isn't just now? All those paper houses that we wot of will tumble down like the card-castles the children build. I do think we could fight through, even though Prendergast's utterly collapsed; we're no mushroom company, and if any house is to be trusted, *ours* is."

"We might survive Prendergast's," replied Robert, again bathing his head; "there's a good deal that might be quickly realised in case of urgent need, but heaven help us if Sims and Sykes' stop payment!"

"Oh, they *won't!* they *won't!*" replied the clerk, with all the assurance he could put into his voice. He did not feel quite confident himself, but he felt that his master must not go away with a fresh anxiety upon him, and as yet Sims and Sykes' had not been talked about, though that very afternoon Prendergast's had been spoken of as being "in a pickle." Presently, just as it was getting dusk, the brougham arrived, and Mr. Wreford was so ill that he needed help in descending the stairs; he was almost fainting before he reached the carriage.

"I shall go with you, sir," said Mr. Long, as he supported his master on the pavement. "You are no more fit to go by yourself than a baby. Wait a minute, coachman, till I fetch my hat."

Robert feebly protested—"Are you not afraid of the infection, Mr. Long?"

"Not a whit," was the reply. "People who have had scarlet-fever as I once had, never take it twice. I should get no harm in a fever-hospital. Besides, if mischief could be done, it is done already. I've been shut up with you over two hours this afternoon. I must see you safe in Mrs. Wreford's charge."

And so, in the dim October evening, they drove away through the noisy, bustling City, and Robert faintly wondered whether he would ever be rattled over the stones again. They took the way of the Embankment, and the breeze blew pleasantly from the river, that glittered as usual with its myriads of reflected lights. They passed by Somerset House, they saw the clock-tower of Westminster, with its dials, like large, hazy moons, and they

heard its deep-toned chimes, as they crossed the foot of Westminster Bridge. On they went, under the walls of the venerable abbey, up Victoria Street, and so past Grosvenor Place to Hyde Park Corner; and more and more Robert felt that he was bidding a long good-bye to these well-known places. His thoughts grew more and more indistinct, though now and then he tried to rouse himself to full consciousness.

"Well, sir," said the clerk, as they left Apsley House to the right, "how do you feel now?"

"Oh, better—certainly better," replied Robert. "I say, Long, do you know 'The Pilgrims of the Night'?"

"Know *who*, sir?"

"'The Pilgrims of the Night'?"

"No, sir. There's 'strangers and pilgrims' everywhere, I suppose, but I can't say I know any particular pilgrims. May I ask to whom you allude, sir?"

"'Angels of Jesus, angels of light,
Singing to welcome the pilgrims of the night,'"

was all Mr. Wreford's answer. Mr. Long, who was a lapsed Quaker, without any special creed, and with no theological opinions, had not the least idea what his companion meant.

"I suppose it's a hymn," he muttered to himself. "Dear me! it's a very bad sign—going on about the angels. He must think he is bound for another world. I never heard him quote a line of poetry, except it was Shakespeare, perhaps—*never*, since I first knew him, a poor, hard-working, shabby, lanky lad, at the bottom of the ladder, almost, ay, *quite* thirty years ago! I was a youngish man then, and I had boys and girls of my own, and now they're all gone, dead or married, and the old woman and I are left alone to do the best we can. What did you say, Mr. Wreford?"

"'Rest comes at length, though life be long and dreary;
The day must dawn, and darksome night be past;
Faith's journey ends in welcome to the weary,
And heaven, the heart's true home, will come at last.'"

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" sighed the old man; "this is very bad—couldn't well be worse." Then aloud: "Come,

sir, you mustn't give way like this, you know. Indeed, you mustn't. Keeping up, and a determination to get well again as fast as possible, is more than half the battle. You don't give yourself a fair chance if you sink down like this. Never mind the 'Pilgrims of the Night.'"

"I hear it as plain as ever I heard anything," replied Robert. "She was always singing it; she had a pretty voice, and sang like a bird, though she was only a dress-maker. I threw that in her face, too, and it wasn't generous, was it, Long?"

"Well, sir, I could not say it was," replied the clerk, comprehending that Mr. Wreford spoke of his first wife, for he had known something of Catherine Wreford in her girlish days, and Miss Halliday had once been very glad to count Mrs. Long among her customers. Then, seeing that Robert still listened, he added: "She was none the worse for being a dressmaker, sir, but very much the better, seeing she had no fortune of her own; for don't the Scriptures say we ought not to 'eat the bread of idleness'? My wife has been behind the counter in her time, and I honour her that she turned to and earned an honest penny when her father died and left her and her mother with six hundred pounds of debts and exactly nothing a-year. There's never any shame in honest labour, to my thinking."

But Mr. Long's simple logic was more than Robert's disturbed brain could grasp. He was beginning to wonder whether Catherine or Maud would meet him when the carriage stopped, and he had a vehement longing to hold in his arms his daughter Anne; but he thought of her as a child just in her teens, not as a young woman engaged to be married. Mr. Long was unfeignedly thankful when at last was reached the stricken house in Hyde Park Gardens. The doctor was waiting, and his instant dictum was, "Get Mr. Wreford to bed immediately."

Before Mr. Long left he saw Maud, who came down to ask him to leave a note for her in Sloane Square, beseeching the speedy services of an experienced nurse. He was shocked to see the ravages which a month of sorrow and suspense had made in the beautiful Mrs. Wreford.

Had he met her promiscuously, he would scarcely have recognised her. "And I believed her to be a mere selfish, fashionable woman of the world," he thought to himself as he looked at the sunken cheeks, and the sharpened features, and the sad, hollow eyes, with the dark livid circles around them. "Dear me! how prone we are to judge others wrongfully! If one could but live out the thirteenth chapter of first Corinthians!"

And now Maud's cup of misery seemed full; Robert was soon in extreme danger, and his little son was evidently sinking fast. The fever had left him, but he had no strength to rally. One comfort came to her unexpectedly. As soon as Laura Gresley heard that Robert was struck down she hastened to Maud's assistance; and in reply to her friend's faint, dull remonstance—"You ought not to be here, Laura"—said, "I am come to stay, Maud; I wrung consent from them this morning by saying that if they wouldn't give it I should go without it. I may as well make myself of some use for once in my useless life, and I am not afraid; I've been in the thick of the fever before, and never took it."

And Maud, past any words of gratitude, could only grasp her hand, and burst into a flood of tears. They were the first she had shed for many days and nights; her eyes had been dry even when the baby died and was taken away for burial, while Robert had been convulsed with his grief. Laura chiefly devoted herself to Robin, for his nurse had broken down utterly, and was clearly sickening for the fever; the doctor insisted on her immediate removal to the hospital, and sent the ambulance for her that very evening. Maud would not hear of taking rest, and she passed her anxious hours between Robert's room and the nursery.

And the weary days sped on, the little one faded rapidly, and his father's symptoms grew from bad to worse, and another physician was summoned—all in vain! The child was dying, there was no doubt of it now; and the strong man laid low, tossed restlessly on his bed of pain, his delirious fancies changing from hour to hour. Now he was a youth again, and he was courting sweet Catherine Halliday; now he was at Ivyside, and

Catherine was weeping because her one child was to be taken from her ; and then once more he heard her whispering for the last time, " Rest comes at last ! " And then he would wail, " Oh, my Catherine, my gentle wife ! my early love ! I have killed you. Oh ! if you could but come back again, my own true Catherine ! " He never spoke of Maud, he did not seem to recognise her, she felt sure he had forgotten her existence, and he never asked now how the little boy was getting on. His second marriage and his second family seemed alike to have faded from his memory. He mourned for Catherine, and he asked incessantly for Anne ; he demanded his clothes, too, that he might go to Fenchurch Street, and he raved confusedly of the firms of Prendergast, Tollerson and Co., Drumlees Brothers, and of some very recent and important transactions with Sims and Sykes.

On the fourth morning from Laura's arrival she was helping Maud strew flowers on the little wasted form, that after so many struggles with disease had succumbed at last. She sobbed as she mingled the delicate blossoms and laid them on the snowy counterpane ; but Maud was calm and tearless. " It is best," she said, as if she were the comforter, and Laura the bereaved one— " it is best ! they [will never know now their miserable mother's shame ; my wretched fate cannot influence theirs. It was kind of God to take them ! *He*—I mean Mallory—cannot hurt them now. And when Robert is gone, he may do his worst."

" Hush, dear ! Robert will recover, I feel persuaded. He has an excellent constitution, you know, and he has always been so steady and abstemious. *I* thought he was a little better this morning."

" I do not wish him to recover, Laura ; though I love him now as I never thought to love mortal being, as I never loved any human creature before ; I cannot, will not, pray that he may live. For once I think I am unselfish ; if he go now, he will never know what I have brought upon him ! He will never know that the mother of his boys was not his lawful wife. He is the last man in the world to bear such a blow without

sinking under it. Respectability, an unstained, unblemished reputation, has always been Robert's idol, and he has never done anything in his life, as far as I know, at which the finger of scorn could point. He has walked from his youth upwards in straight paths, he has never touched dirt lest he should be defiled, and I have dragged him into the very mire itself. He never would forgive me, and his life would be a burden to him to the end. Better that he should go now, knowing nothing, believing in me, clinging to me as his very own. I can bear anything when he is gone."

And again the weary days and nights went on, and the grave in Kensal Green Cemetery was opened for little Robin. Laura was the only person who attended the funeral, and she could not but think of the probability of another and more imposing funeral on the same spot, taking place within a very few days. When she returned in the solitary mourning-coach Robert was very much worse, and the doctor confessed that he entertained the gravest apprehensions. Then Laura said to Maud, "Ought not Anne Wreford to know?"

CHAPTER XLIV.

AND even as Laura spoke, Anne was on her way to her father's house. Only that morning had she heard of Mr. Wreford's grievous illness. He had written to her just before the symptoms of the fever first disclosed themselves, informing her of little Freddy's death, and speaking sadly of the state of the elder child. But he emphatically commanded her not to come near the house, or even to venture to Fenchurch Street, till all risk of infection should be over. She was to remain at Sevenoaks, or to

accept Mrs. Markham's invitation to accompany her and Flora to Eastbourne; and, as soon as it was safe, Mr. and Mrs. Wreford would join them there, the Paris journey being now altogether out of the question.

This letter had been presented to Anne on the night of her arrival in England; and Philip, knowing how matters were likely to go with the Wrefords, and dreading lest she should, on the spur of the moment, rush off to Hyde Park Gardens, hurried his aunt and Flora Enra off to Eastbourne as speedily as possible.

"Anne cannot and must not go home," he had said to Mrs. Markham; "it would be much better for her to be at the seaside."

Mrs. Markham entirely acquiesced, being herself, as she observed, very much in want of some change.

And when Philip returned on the following evening from London, and brought Anne her father's message, desiring her to remain with the Rutlands, it was at once decided that the removal to Eastbourne should take place immediately, and Philip would also go down and see them comfortably installed, leaving Nellie to follow, or to remain at home, as should seem most expedient.

Anne enjoyed her lover's society for two days, and then he returned to town, his presence being imperatively required on urgent business affairs. The trouble in the City, and the news from the provinces, did not improve; Philip had so much to do that it was several days before he found his way to Fenchurch Street, and there he saw Mr. Long, who gave him the very worst accounts of Mr. Wreford. And then, as may be supposed, he was troubled in his mind as to what course of conduct he should pursue as regarded his betrothed; she certainly ought to be informed of her father's precarious state, and yet it was dreadful to think of her going fresh from the Channel breezes into the tainted fever-atmosphere. One whole day he deliberated, and then he made fresh inquiries of Mr. Long. It so happened that the bulletin from Hyde Park Gardens had that morning been more favourable; the sick man was quieter, had slept, and, it was thought, had recognised Mrs. Wreford.

"It's about Miss Wreford I am thinking," said Philip.

"She ought not to remain in ignorance of her father's dangerous illness; but I lack the courage to write and tell her of it."

"She ought to know, certainly," replied the old man; "and yet I should not like her to rush into the infection, as I am pretty sure she would. She would be safe to catch the fever, coming out of that pure air. And she's not actually wanted; there are two trained nurses from the Institution, and Miss Gresley is with Mrs. Wreford. Added to which there's an empty nursery now. Also, Mr. Wreford has done without seeing his daughter for three years, or thereabouts, so he may rub on a little longer, I suppose. Nevertheless, it would be very awkward if he died; the young lady would have a just right to complain. I think, if I were you, I would not write to-day, Mr. Rutland. The accounts this morning are better, and there may be further improvement to-morrow. Once on the mend, he'll get on fast, for he has a fine constitution, undermined by no youthful follies; I should say a more temperate person never lived. Yes, I should advise you, if I may take so much liberty, to wait a little longer before you disturb Miss Wreford. From what I remember of her, I should say that nothing would keep her from the sick room if once she got an inkling of the true state of affairs."

And so Philip determined to wait yet another twenty-four hours before he broke the news to Anne; but he was, notwithstanding, extremely uneasy. He was not at all certain that the girl would not feel herself ill-treated, and, to some extent, deceived, when she should know the truth. Even if all danger were past she might resent the concealment which had been practised. And what if her father should suddenly become worse, and die before she had so much as heard that he was ill!

The news he got next day was not reassuring, and the next it was so bad that nothing remained but to go down to Eastbourne, and convey the sad intelligence, telling the whole story, without reserve. And then Anne must decide for herself; he had no right to control her actions, and even as her husband, he would scarcely have felt justified in detaining her, under such circumstances. He

telegraphed, by way of preparation, ere he started, and while the day was yet young he was walking at full speed from the Eastbourne station towards his aunt's lodgings. The telegram had arrived an hour or more before him, and he found Anne quite ready to take the next train to town. She had at once divined what Philip's unexpected journey portended. When she had heard the truth, she said, simply, "I have expected this, and I have held myself in readiness; but, oh! Philip dear! never keep anything from me again. I know you did it out of love, but don't let it be again. If we are to be happy together through life we must have no secrets of any kind from each other. There is a train at half-past two; will that be too soon for you?"

"By no means. You do not hesitate, then? You mean to go to Hyde Park Gardens?"

"What else can I do? I am not afraid, and I must go where duty calls me; I must do what my mother would have done."

It was a mournful journey; it recalled those other hours of travel when she was hastening from Paris to her mother's death-bed. And Philip was with her then; he seemed to have been with her as a comfort and a protection in every crisis of her existence. And, thinking of this, she put her hand in his, and whispered, "It is so good that I have always had you to care for me, Philip; I could not do without you now." And then he knew that his offences in the way of concealment were entirely condoned. When they reached Victoria, Anne said, "Now we must part; the cab will take me safely home, and I would rather go alone."

"I shall go with you," he replied.

"No, you will not, Philip. You have no right to trifle with your life; my danger, if there be any, cannot be diminished by your sharing it. You cannot help me, you would only increase my anxiety, and perhaps add to my affliction. Please, don't vex me by opposition."

"Promise me one thing! If you are ill yourself, let me know at once."

"I promise. You would have the same right then to come to me that I have now to go to my father. I have

had the fever once, though slightly, and I do not think I shall take it again. That, however, is in God's hands, and I am content to leave it there. Be you content, too, dear; our strength just at present is in quietness and in confidence. Good-bye."

It was quite dark when Anne drove up to the house. Almost breathlessly she looked at the windows, and to her great relief discerned no signs of death anywhere. There were lights on all the floors, and a servant who was a stranger to her was taking in something from a tradesman's cart. The man who opened the door was also a stranger to her, and he stared as she quietly crossed the threshold, and told him to bring in the luggage from the cab.

"There's trouble in the house," said he; "the mistress sees no company."

"I am Miss Wreford," was Anne's reply. "Tell your mistress I am come home."

He went away to do her bidding. In three minutes Laura Gresley came to her; Maud was with her husband. "I am glad you are come," was Miss Gresley's salutation; "I said only this morning that you ought to know. And Maud thought so, too. But do you think it was prudent to come here?"

"I think it was *right*! In fact, I could do nothing else. How is he?"

"Much the same; now worse, now better. Sometimes wildly delirious, and again tolerably quiet, in a sort of stupor. Oh, Anne, it has been a dreadful time, and we haven't seen the end of it yet. Both those dear little boys dead and buried, and your papa as ill as he can be! Such a heap of trouble!" And Laura thought wofully of the trouble that might not be disclosed—that which had turned Maud's pride and arrogance into meek humility, and transformed herself from a frivolous, empty-headed girl into a thoughtful, efficient, sympathetic woman. An hour elapsed before Maud came down to her. One glance at the pallid, sunken cheeks and sharpened features was enough. She flung herself into her stepmother's arms, crying, "Oh, mamma, mamma! how much you must have suffered!" And both were clasped

in a long embrace that neither would have endured one little month ago.

"Anne, can you forgive me?" said Maud at length.

"Don't speak of such a thing, mamma! I don't say you were good to me, for I am sure you were not; but I am quite as sure that I was prejudiced and ever so disagreeable. Let the dead Past bury its dead, and let you and me begin again. No! don't say another word; you will be a kind mamma to me,"—for the very life of her, Anne could not say *mother!*—"and I will try to be a dutiful daughter to you. Is it a bargain?"

"You are very generous, Anne. Yes; I will try. I do not think I shall ever be as I used to be. My heart is broken."

"Ah! those darling little brothers; and I never saw them. No wonder you are almost sinking under such a blow! But dear father will be spared to us, please God!"

"I don't know—I don't know! Oh, Anne, if you knew all!"

Anne naturally imagined that she referred to her own shortcomings as a wife, that the sting of past sins against her husband rankled cruelly now that separation seemed impending. She little guessed that Maud *dared* not pray for the life of him whom she still accounted her husband.

After that evening the shadows deepened more and more, and the strife between life and death grew hourly more terrible. A weaker or less healthy man would have succumbed long ago, the doctors said; it was marvellous how the patient held out day after day, how the sound constitution and the vigorous organisation defied the inroads of disease. But still Robert Wreford lived, and his daughter hoped and prayed and watched, while Maud would have given worlds to be able to hope and pray likewise. The watching and the tending, the slow anguish, and the dull despair, were hers, and nothing more. No! nothing more! She shuddered and groaned within herself at the thought of what must come ere long. Vaguely, she wondered why her enemy left her all this while in peace, since he certainly must know where to lay his hands upon her at any moment; there could be no reasonable doubt that Miss Knell was his emissary. Was

it possible that after all he had a human heart, and hesitated to strike, while death and the shadow of death encompassed her household?

At length was sounded the tocsin of alarm. One evening, as she sat by Robert's bed, a little pink-edged, scented note was brought to her, and she at once divined that this was a missive from Miss Knell.

It was many a year since she had looked upon those scrawling, spidery characters, but it was a caligraphy that, once seen, was not easily forgotten. The envelope was addressed to Mrs. Wreford. The contents ran thus:—

“DEAR MRS. MALLORY,—For that, you *know*, is your *real* and only *legal* name! I have something of *importance* to communicate to you, and must, therefore, request an *early* and *private* interview. Your natural quickness and ready comprehension will tell you, I am sure, what is the nature of the proposed communication. But lest you should demur, I will just say that I bring you news of one *near* and *dear* to you, long supposed to be deceased. Meet me to-morrow morning at the Bayswater end of the Broad Walk, not later than eleven o'clock. I will not fail you.—Yours truly,

“JANE KNELL.”

Anne was in the room when this letter was put into her step-mother's hands, and, looking up, she saw a sudden change come over her. There was a sort of frozen horror in her face when she dropped the note, as though it were something loathsome and venomous, and for nearly ten minutes she sat like one stunned or paralysed. Then, with a shuddering sigh, she rose and left the chamber, groping her way, as it would seem, to the door. Anne did not like to follow her, though she perceived clearly enough that some bewildering trouble had come to her. Her idea was, that it was a sudden demand for money that was owed, for she had some faint knowledge of Mrs. Wreford's boundless extravagance, and Philip had lately told her that he was sure she would plunge her husband into difficulties, if he did not speedily put some curb upon her too lavish expenditure.

But the tryst must be kept. Maud knew that it could not be evaded. The morning, when it came, was heavy

and dark, and a thick, drizzling rain was falling. What excuse could she possibly make for leaving the house under such circumstances? She, who never adventured her feet upon muddy pavements! She, who rather prided herself upon never taking her walks abroad in unpropitious weather! She would have given much for the shelter of Laura's companionship, but she feared to displease her contemptible persecutor by acting contrary to her demand; though, of course, Miss Knell's note was shown to Miss Gresley, and the two ladies took counsel together concerning its contents.

"Just put on my waterproof and step out," said Laura; "when such issues are at stake, it does not do to question what other people will think. Besides, you are your own mistress, and the lady of the house."

"Would that I were my own mistress!" sighed Maud, wearily; but she accepted the loan of the waterproof, put on her darkest and shabbiest bonnet, with a thick veil, and "stepped out," as Laura had advised.

Miss Knell was at her post, sitting under her gingham umbrella, with pools of water at her feet, and the sere autumn leaves drifting around her at every breeze. She gave a little start as Maud approached, exclaiming, "Well, I never! I actually didn't know you, Mrs. Mallory! I took you for some humble individual, who could not afford a cab. Another proof that 'fine feathers make fine birds,' isn't it?"

Maud made no reply, but, sitting down on the damp seat as far as possible from her enemy, said, quietly, "Will you be so good as to enter at once upon the business to which you referred in your note? I have very little time at my disposal."

"I must say you are the very coolest person I ever encountered!" was the reply.

"Yes; it is my nature to take things coolly. Proceed, if you please."

"Have you no questions to put?"

"None whatever."

"Don't you want to know how I learned that your husband was still in the land of the living?"

"I do not."

"Well! if there ever was an uninquisitive woman, you are one."

"Exactly. But, if you have nothing else to say, I must beg you to excuse me. Mr. Wreford requires my constant attendance."

"What will Mr. Wreford say when he hears of the claims of Mr. Stephen Mallory?" asked Miss Knell, with a most diabolical sneer, which suggested to her victim memories of that dismal past, when they two were dwellers together under the roof of the virtuous Misses Cottle.

"Mr. Wreford is dying," said Maud, calmly; "he will never be troubled by Stephen Mallory; he will never hear of his existence. God is better to me than I deserve; He has taken my children, now He is taking my husband, and placing him beyond the reach of harm."

"Your *husband*, Mrs. Mallory?"

"Yes, my husband! My husband in God's sight. I married Robert Wreford in all good faith; he has been very good to me; he is the father of my dead children. Soon he will be where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage. I love him; but I thank God for taking him from the evil to come. You cannot hurt *him*, Miss Knell; he is safe from you, and from the wretched man who has bribed you to insult me."

"You use very strong language, Mrs. Mallory. But as you are not dying, how about yourself? Do you expect that your true husband will forego his claims?"

"I expect nothing. When I have closed Robert Wreford's eyes, Stephen Mallory may work his wicked will. What he may do, or not do, is of no consequence to me."

"The world will talk, however."

"Let it talk. The world and I have parted company. But listen, Jane Knell! I have been a sinful, godless woman, and I have provoked God's just wrath and indignation. Nevertheless, I have humbled myself before Him, I have spoken to Him as a long-rebellious child speaks to his justly offended father, and entreats his pardon, and the remission of his punishment. I have said to God, 'Deliver me out of the hand of Stephen Mallory,

and from all my cruel enemies.' And He *will deliver me*. I am not afraid of what man, or woman, can do unto me."

For a moment Miss Knell was cowed and baffled. Then she resumed: "All that is very well, Mrs. Mallory; you always were famous for heroics, I remember. But fine words butter no parsnips, you know! and I must deliver my message. I am here to propose terms."

"Propose them."

"It is quite indelicate to be so abrupt. You speak as if I were the delinquent, and you the arbitrator of *my* fate. Well, not to beat about the bush, your *husband* offers to release you now, and for ever; you shall never see his face again, or hear his name; he will neither directly nor indirectly interfere with you, never disclose to any mortal being his rightful claims upon you——"

"On what conditions?"

"Simply these: You pay into *his* hands, not mine—for I know you distrust *me*!—five hundred pounds within twenty-four hours, and five thousand more before the last day of this present month of October. Do this, and Mr. Mallory is from henceforth dead to you, as though earth covered him; dead, as you not unreasonably supposed him to be when you married Jacob Russell and Robert Wreford. He receives, first and last, five thousand five hundred pounds in Bank of England notes, and *disappears* entirely and for ever!"

"You might as well ask me for five millions of money. I can no more obtain five thousand pounds—no, nor five hundred—without Mr. Wreford's knowledge, than you can. And if I could, I would not. Do you think I am such a fool as to trust Stephen Mallory? Do I not know him of old, and do I not know *you*? Would you keep faith, either of you? Just as long as it suited your own purposes would you be true to your promises."

"But he would swear—I would swear——"

"Oaths are empty words to Stephen Mallory, and such as he. He would swear away my life—ay, and *yours* too, if it brought him any profit, or delivered him from any risk. Tell your employer I reject his proposals; he may do his worst. Robert Wreford is beyond his reach; he may wreak his vengeance on me—if *he can*. But, to use

a favourite expression of his own, I think Scotland Yard will stop *that little game*—to a great extent, at least. Now, good morning."

And before Miss Knell could find words to express her astonishment Maud was some yards on her way to the entrance of the Gardens.

"Well! she beats all!" was the spinster's comment. "I never did! No, I never did! But it will go very hard with me if I don't make her lick the dust before I've done with her. Yes, my proud madam, I'll move heaven and earth to bring you on your marrow-bones; I'll pay you out for your insolence, past and present, or my name's not Jane Knell. I wonder, though, what she meant by 'Scotland Yard'? was it anything more than an empty threat? I wish I knew! I should not be surprised at anything that happened to Stephen Mallory."

So saying, she trudged off through the rain, now falling heavily, and through the mud ankle-deep, to the appointed rendezvous with her disreputable principal. Maud went slowly home, careless of rain or mud, or chilling mist; careless that some one whom she knew met her face to face, and stared as if he had seen a ghost; careless of everything and everybody in the world, so careless that she never trembled when she just escaped being run down by a heavily-freighted omnibus.

When night came Robert still lived, but that was all. And Messrs. Sims and Sykes' were in that day's *Gazette*; they had failed for an unprecedented amount, and the assets were reported to be "not worth mentioning."



CHAPTER XLV.

COMING TO THE FRONT.

ALL that night, and all the next day, Mr. Wreford was worse than ever, and the fever was evidently approaching its height. It had assumed a typhoid complexion. Once more there was a medical consultation, and it was agreed on all hands that the next twelve hours must involve the issues of life and death; by noon next day Robert would either be ready for his grave in Kensal Green Cemetery, or free from the dreadful malady with which he had so long struggled. But the doctors anticipated the worst. Only Dr. Summers, who had watched the case from the beginning, and attended the little ones who were gone, ventured to admit the remote possibility of recovery, and he could easily perceive that his brethren were entirely opposed to him as regarded this conviction. They told him plainly that his sanguine expectations could never be realised.

"Dr. Summers still clings to a faint hope," said the great physician of the day, as he closed his hand on the liberal fee which Mrs. Wreford tendered; "but I would not have you build upon it, my dear madam. I would willingly speak a word of cheer, but I *dare* not encourage you to look for anything approaching to restoration. When the crisis now commencing is fairly over—I fear—I greatly fear—that exhausted nature will rapidly succumb."

"I have no hope," said Maud, wearily. "What poor hope I had died days ago. Thank you for your kind attentions, but from the first I knew that they must be fruitless."

"When the hour of departure strikes, dear madam, vain is the skill of the physician! When God calls away, none can resist the summons."

Maud bowed her head; she did not care now to waste words on any subject. She had suffered so much and so

long, that a sort of torpor was stealing over her faculties ; even her feelings were numbed, and as for the fountain of tears, that was entirely sealed. The great man, as he took his departure, said to himself, " Poor, poor woman ! In a few days I shall be summoned on her account. If I mistake not, she will not be long separated from her husband."

Dr. Summers gave his last directions, and then Maud and the nurse and Anne prepared for the solemn vigil which awaited them. Laura went early to bed, worn out with the previous night's watch. She was to be called if there was " any change."

Any change ! Ah, what common-place little words ! but how terrible their import, when our loved ones are lying, speechless and helpless, on a couch of mortal sickness ! Anne trembled and turned cold, as she assured Laura that she should be summoned when their long, sad watch should draw to its conclusion. " Poor child," said Laura, as she kissed Anne at her bedroom door ; " it is a sad coming home for you, after all these years of exile ; and the worst is yet to come ! "

" It may be," replied Anne ; " the physicians will not give a gleam of hope ; only Dr. Summers seems to think that there is just a faint possibility of a favourable termination of this crisis. But God can raise him up, even now, if He wills it, and oh ! if it *might* be His will ! If Christ would but speak the word, as He did when He was on the earth ! "

" If the Great Healer were but here now ! "

" He is ! He is here, Laura ! and His love and His pity are just the same as they were in the olden time. Do you know, I am almost persuaded that He has heard our prayers, and that in His great mercy He will raise up my dear father ! I will not give up hoping and praying while life remains. And I am sure Maud prays ; but——"

" But what, my dear ? "

" But I cannot quite understand her. I cannot doubt now her love for my father, and yet I could sometimes fancy that she is not anxious that he should recover. It seems to me that there is something which I am not to know—that there is some terrible secret which you only

share with Maud. Laura, what is it? I have a right to ask if it concerns my own father."

"Don't ask, child, for I can tell you nothing. I may not breathe a word."

"Then there is a secret?"

"There is! Be wise, Anne, and put no further questions; believe me that in this case ignorance indeed is bliss."

"Maud looks like a haunted person."

"She is haunted, and so am I. Take my advice, child, and seek to know no more; it is a grim spectre that waylays us at every turn, and it would not mend matters if you, too, were subject to its visitations."

"You speak very strangely, Laura. I don't like riddles."

"Nor I either; but there, it cannot be helped. Once more, good-night, and don't trouble yourself about the secret care. You can do no good, but you might unwittingly do harm."

And Laura almost pushed Anne from the threshold, and closed and bolted her door. Amazed and half-stupefied the girl went slowly downstairs, and as she did so there was a ring at the muffled bell, and immediately afterwards Mr. Ebenezer Long was admitted. He was shown into the library, and Anne went to him there. She had a great liking and esteem for this old and faithful friend.

"No better report, I grieve to hear," he said, as she put out her hand. "I am a late visitor, but I could not go home without knowing how things were, and I was detained in Fenchurch Street long after my usual time. There is great trouble in the City, Miss Wreford; such trouble as I never thought I should live to see."

"Yes, I know; Mr. Rutland has told me all about it."

"I am glad of that; but how could Mr. Rutland know? Ah! I suppose Mr. Wreford gave him his confidence that last day they were in Fenchurch Street together. But we should have pulled through if Sims and Sykes' had but kept their heads above water! Prendergast's failure was a sad business for us, but a house like ours can weather such a storm as would wreck ten of the modern,

ordinary mushroom firms. I was most anxious, of course, but I hoped for the best up till yesterday, when I heard that Sims and Sykes' had gone *smash!* You might have knocked me down with a feather when I got the news."

"I do not quite understand. Have we—had my father anything to do with Sims and Sykes'?"

"Too much! only too much, Miss Wreford. I always said that house would come to grief the moment things went contrary. And now, what is to be done *I don't know!* I wish to God I did, and I'd do it, if flesh and blood could compass it. And there's nobody but me, Miss Wreford. Everybody comes to me; and what to say to them, or how to act, I know no more than the babe unborn. The whole world is turned topsy-turvy, and Fenchurch Street—*our* Fenchurch Street, I mean—is all at sixes and sevens. It's too much for my poor, old, stupid head."

"Do you mean that there is any danger of my father's affairs becoming complicated? Do the failures to which you have alluded at all affect *us*?"

"Affect us, Miss Wreford! Why we hold I can't say how much of their accursed paper. If Mr. Wreford were at the helm himself, something *might* be managed. If any man alive could steer his ship through such a tempest, it's Robert Wreford; but there he lies, as good as dead, they tell me; and ruin, utter ruin, is inevitable! I shall never hold up my head again—no, never! if the good old house is done for. If only I could take counsel with any one, if I could but receive certain orders from the master!"

"Could you not consult Mr. Rutland—Mr. Philip, I mean? You know my father respects his judgment as a business man, and he trusts him, certainly."

"That he does, Miss Wreford; but it's a serious thing for a person in my position, and at such a crisis, to tell tales out of school, even to a trusted friend. And it's not the governor's way to be confidential. Take him all in all, he is close and reserved as an oyster. He has trusted me more than anybody," continued the old man, proudly; "but, except upon certain points, I am terribly in the

dark. It would be an immense comfort to me if I could talk freely to Mr. Philip—if he were only a relation, now!"

"If that is all, there is no difficulty, for I am engaged, with my father's full consent, to marry Mr. Philip Rutland, and the wedding was fixed for December before all this sickness befell. You may regard Mr. Rutland as my father's son."

"That alters the matter, I must confess, Miss Wreford. I suppose it would be of no use to advise with Mrs. Wreford."

"Not the least, for I am sure she would urge you to refer all difficulties to Mr. Philip Rutland. There is no one else."

"No one else," responded Mr. Long. "And there *must* be somebody to look into matters. I could not if I would. I can guess at a good deal, and I'm an old man at business; but it don't do to trust to guesses, when the least blunder may be fatal. One must take speedy measures when earthquakes are the order of the day. How am I to know for certain whether my master is really as accountable as some people say? I wouldn't mind, in such an emergency, overhauling the books and private accounts, in company with Mr. Philip, or any other *responsible* person. You couldn't do anything yourself, I suppose, Miss Anne?"

"I! I really don't know; I am afraid not. I would rather leave it to Mr. Rutland. You may, if you like, consider that he acts for me, and I will be responsible for any trust that you may repose in him. And—did you ever hear?—for a long time my education was conducted with a view to my taking a place in the counting office. My father intended that I should come into the business just as if I were a son instead of a daughter. I was to be his partner, I believe, at the proper time, and to succeed him as head of the whole concern if I survived him."

"Yes, Miss Anne, I have heard that such were the intentions of our head. And I'm sure I don't know why a sensible, clear-brained, wide-awake young lady like yourself should not do quite as well in the counting-house as a young gentleman who prepares, as a matter

of course, to follow in his father's footsteps. But all that was given up, so at least I understood, when the eldest little boy was born."

"I suppose it was. At least, nothing was said of the old arrangement when Mr. Philip Rutland spoke to my father. Whether the death of these two little brothers, whom I never saw, poor dears! will make any difference, I cannot even guess. But, Mr. Long, do you seriously think I could be of any service?"

"I seriously think you could be of immense service, Miss Wreford, if you would only be so good as to assume a certain authority in Fenchurch Street. I could coach you up in a few hours, if we had the right books and papers before us."

"I dare say I should soon understand, especially if I decided to look into the private correspondence. But you know, Mr. Long, my signature would be valueless. I could sign nothing for my father without what is called a power of attorney, could I? And it would be impossible to obtain that as things are; and then, I am not of age!"

"But you could look into things, and you could tell me, or show me, if you pleased, whatever you felt to be needful. I would act under you, and refer myself to you whenever it became necessary to take liberties with private documents. And you could always consult Mr. Spooner, our firm's old, trustworthy lawyer; indeed, I should advise you to place every confidence in him. If you will take your father's place, Miss Anne—as far as you are able, that is—I'll work day and night. I'll move heaven and earth; I'll hold on like grim death, but I'll baffle those who want to run us down to earth, the rascals! Only, I *must* have a chief!"

"A lay figure would make about as effective 'a chief' as I should, I am afraid."

"You would do very well, Miss Anne; you're your father's own daughter, you've got his quick perception, and his way of looking at a thing all round. There are some people in the world, ay, and experienced people, too, who never can be got to comprehend that everything is at least two-sided, and often three, six, or ten-sided; and

some few so many-sided that it takes half a lifetime to get all round them."

"But, Mr. Long, not for all the business in London would I leave my father now. The doctors, all but one, say that he is at the point of death. My place for the present is here."

"For the present, yes. But another day will make all the difference. Either there will be no more hope, or else a great deal more. The actual suspense must be ended soon."

"I know that. To-morrow morning I shall be an orphan—or, I shall keep my dear father for many years to come, I trust. I think, in spite of what Sir Henry says, that God will yet spare his life, and give him back to wife and child. I cannot say, I cannot tell why, but I feel strangely assured that this dreadful sickness is *not* unto death. Should I unhappily be wrong, should my father die, I will at once do what you request, though Mrs. Wreford would then be the proper person to act, I imagine."

"Mrs. Wreford is not a business woman, and you are. Of course, if there is no son of mature years, the widow is the person to administer; but if I mistake not, she would be very willing to shift the responsibility from her shoulders to your own. Pardon me, Miss Anne, but do you know if your father's *will* is made?"

"I do not; I know absolutely nothing of his affairs. You forget that I have been away from home these three years. Mr. Philip Rutland would be more likely than any other person to be informed. I wish you would see him, and speak to him without reserve. You say yourself how much my father trusted him, and you know, far better than I can tell you, how thoroughly his judgment in business matters is to be respected. I think if I am to command, my first order must be, Go to-morrow morning to Mr. Philip Rutland, and tell him what you have said to me, and what you wish me to do, and ask him if he approves of your proposals."

"I will obey you, madam. I will see Mr. Philip as soon as possible to-morrow. But!—I may not be able to obtain an interview as easily as you seem to suppose.

'Rutland and Son' have about as much as they can manage, and a little more, upon their hands just now. I met Mr. Rutland, the elder, a day or two ago, and he seemed terribly shaken; he looked ten years older than when I saw him last. He told me—in strict confidence, of course—that Prendergast's downfall was an awful blow, and that another week or so might find them—the Rutlands, you know—preparing to call their creditors together! Now, I've told the truth, and I can't in conscience trouble Mr. Rutland, junior, with *our* business when he's at his wits' end to bolster up his own concerns till this detestable panic is over. We might appeal to Mr. Philip on any particular point, you or I, or both of us. But as for expecting him to take our affairs fully into consideration, why it would be downright unreasonable! Of course, his being *your* lover, Miss Anne—your promised husband—would make an immense difference; but then, you see, one captain can't command two distressed ships at the same moment, especially when both are ready to go to the bottom! And the old gentleman, he is not what he was, and is just on the point of retiring from active participation in the business, as I dare say you know, ma'am. No, Miss Anne; it's *you* that must come to the front in this terrible emergency, and, God helping us, we'll pull through, *if possible*! And our folks in the office are reliable, down to the least understrapper. Mr. Wreford always had picked men to serve him. We've a staff in a thousand, Miss Wreford; and in God's name, I beseech you to come and help us."

"I will think of it," said Anne, gravely. "If you receive neither note nor telegram from me before two o'clock to-morrow, expect me at Fenchurch Street."

"Exactly at one o'clock, madam, I will have the fire lighted in Mr. Wreford's private room. He brought home his most private keys that night, I know; I put them into his bag with my own hands, together with some very important papers. If, as is most likely, that bag has never been unpacked, you had better bring it with you, keys and all."

CHAPTER XLVI.

"I HAVE DONE WITH CROOKED WAYS FOR EVER."

It was drawing towards midnight when Anne went back to the sick chamber to share her step-mother's watch. She stepped softly into the adjoining dressing-room, and listened. All was still, so still that a dull terror seized her lest all should even now be over. She could hear no sound, and yet the lights burned faintly, and she felt sure that both Maud and the night-nurse were in attendance. Unable to bear the suspense, she crept towards the half-open door, and saw Mrs. Wreford bending over the sufferer. The nurse sat like a statue on the other side of the bed. Her father still lived, then, she thought; but was this the torpor that precedes death, or was it the healing sleep for which they had prayed so earnestly and so long? Maud saw her, as she pushed the door a little further, and came to her, with her finger on her lips. "Hush!" she said, "not a sound, not a breath, here! Go back into the dressing-room." And when they were there, she continued, still in whispers, "He is asleep, really asleep! He moaned, and tossed, and muttered till about ten o'clock, and then, suddenly he grew quieter, and at last—more than an hour ago—he dropped off like a baby. He is breathing quite softly, and seems as sound asleep as ever I saw him. I dare not touch him, but I fancy his skin is a little moist. I wish you would go down and tell the servants that they must not move except on tiptoe."

"They are all gone to bed except cook and Prance; but I will speak to them at once. They will be so glad to know that he is sleeping. I will be back in five minutes. Oh, mamma! don't you thank God for this sweet, blessed slumber?"

Maud did not speak, but such an expression of anguish spread itself over her haggard countenance that Anne

paused in astonishment. "What is it, mamma?" she said, in a tone of the deepest compassion. "What is this secret grief that is weighing you down, and crushing all the spirit out of you?"

"Is not your papa's illness cause enough? Is it strange that I should be unutterably miserable?" answered Maud, trying in vain to rally.

"Yes, I know," was Anne's reply; "but it seems to me that there is something beyond this outward sorrow; indeed, I know there is. I told Laura there was a secret, and she did not deny it. Mamma, will you not trust me? I want to be a good daughter to you, as well as to my dear father. Let me share your trouble, your solicitude, whatever it may be."

By this time they had passed from the dressing-room into Maud's own *boudoir* beyond, and there Anne resumed: "It cannot be that there are difficulties in the business, because I am sure that even failure and the prospect of reduced circumstances could never move you so. Tell me what it is, mamma, and if I can I will help you; I will help you at any cost to myself. Do tell me."

"Child! child! you little know what you ask," responded Maud, vehemently. "Tell *you*! tell *you*! But, ah! you will know all soon—my shame, my agony, my treachery! Anne, if you love your father, pray God that he may die to-night!"

"Mamma! Maud!" cried Anne, in extremity of horror. "Are you mad? Surely it is so!—the death of those dear little boys, and father's long illness, have been too much for you. Pray that my father—your husband—may die! Oh, Maud, tell me you did not mean it."

"I did mean it; I do mean it. No, I am as perfectly sane as you are. Would to God I were mad, that all this horror were but a maniac's delusion! But it is a dread reality; it closes me round; it drags me down to hell. I cannot escape, unless I die."

"For mercy's sake tell me the truth!" gasped Anne, almost sinking with emotion. "You must, you surely *must* exaggerate the danger, whatever it may be! What awful thing is it that has come to pass that makes you wish your own death, and my father's?"

"Is there not something in the Bible about being taken from the evil to come?"

"Of course there is; but that is God's affair, not ours. People do pray to die, I know; but they must be in the direst extremity before they can deliberately pray for death; and even if you longed for death yourself, why should you ask the same fatal gift for my father?"

"Oh, Anne, you cannot understand—how should you? For the last few weeks I have felt that death would be a boon. I have lived a life worse than a hundred deaths since the blow that has crushed me fell on me like a thunderbolt. How bitter it has all been no one can guess! I love my husband, though I wickedly married him for money and position. I love him truly and faithfully now. I do indeed, Anne. God Almighty, who has seen all my folly and all my sin, knows that at last—when too late—I love the man I have so cruelly, shamefully wronged. Yet I have prayed that he may die, that he will never have to listen to the shameful, miserable tale. Anne, if you really love your father, pray, as I pray, that while he sleeps so peacefully yonder, the good God may take his soul into that world where all tears are for ever wiped away."

"No, I will not; I will pray for his *life* here on earth. My father is a brave man, who never yet shrank from trial or difficulty when it was inevitable; and whatever be this mysterious sorrow which awaits him, if he survive, I know that he will meet it, and combat with it courageously. Maud, you used one dreadful word—a word that fills me with dismay. You said your story was a *shameful* one! In pity tell me that—that—no one has dishonoured my father! Will you not answer me? I cannot, will not, think that the woman who has taken my mother's place has been ever so little unfaithful to her marriage-vows!"

"God is my witness, Anne, that I am, and ever have been, true to your father, Robert Wreford. Never, in thought, word, or deed, have I wavered in my wifely fidelity. I would swear it, were it my dying utterance."

"Thank God!" sobbed Anne, relieved beyond measure. "Then, if there be no sin, no shadow of guilt, no wrong—

doing, there cannot be shame, and the cloud, heavy and threatening as it looks, may pass away."

"No, no!" cried Maud, bursting into an agony of tears; "it can never pass away—it is a certain doom, from which there is no appeal. Ask me no more. I have been most culpable in talking to you so; I would beg you to forget, only I know that it is impossible. But try to be calm now, and think only of your father. I will go back to my post, and I wish you would speak to the servants who are sitting up."

Anne was amazed at Maud's sudden composure; she had evidently schooled herself to put a brave front upon her terrible and mysterious trouble. She went downstairs and gave orders that the greatest quietude should be preserved throughout the house. Then she returned to the sick chamber, to find the patient still profoundly sleeping, the nurse nodding in her chair behind the curtain, and her step-mother on her knees by the bedside. Anne noiselessly settled herself in the easy-chair, which she generally occupied while on watch, and then a stillness, as of death, filled the hushed room and all the silent house.

The hours passed swiftly, for both Anne and Maud were feeling with that intensity which ignores the flight of time. Anne thought of a thousand things; of the earliest memories of her childhood; of her own beloved mother; of that first meeting, at Etretat, with the woman now kneeling at the shadowy bedside; of that gay wedding, when she wore her *rose-de-thé* silk dress; of her life in France; of Philip's love, so true and tender and so steadfast; and a little of the marriage that was to have been before Christmas, but which must now be indefinitely postponed. Then she recalled all that passed between her and Mr. Long that evening, and reflected that the day in which she must nerve herself to action had already commenced. In less than twelve hours she must be in Fenchurch Street. However this night's vigil ended, she must incur the responsibility of immediately investigating her father's most private business affairs; and, girl as she was, and inexperienced, she naturally shrank from this. What if she committed some fatal error? What

if her father, on his recovery, took umbrage at her presumption?

Earnestly she prayed that she might be guided aright. "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe!" was continually, though silently, on her lips. Then she prayed for poor Maud: "O God!" she entreated, "have mercy upon her. If she has erred, visit her, not according to her sins, but help her in this hour of her great extremity; set her free from the snares that encompass her, and deliver her out of the hand of her cruel foes. And for my dear father, I ask only that Thou wouldest do for him what Thou wilt. Thou knowest whether life or death is better for him. I leave him in Thy kind hands; I commit him, body and soul, into Thy loving keeping. And let me rejoice in Thy will, my God, whatever shall betide."

And still the sleeper slept, and Maud remained upon her knees. The nurse rose softly, and, with scarce a sound, replenished the dying fire. Cordials and medicine were at hand, ready for the invalid's awaking. Anne, a little relieved from her tension of thought, began to wonder when the morning would come. It seemed a long time now since she had closed the door on Ebenezer Long. Would that awful sleep never be over? Would Maud never arise and speak? Would the night watch never be past and over? Would the dusky shadows never be lifted, and the daylight shine upon the world?

And back to Anne's faithful, loving heart came the answer, "Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning;" and she said to herself, over and over again, "'Joy cometh in the morning,' and the morning must be near at hand." And so, with the words of sacred promise on her lips, she fell asleep, and when she awoke the morning was shining behind the thick-folded curtains, and outside were the usual sounds of the world's common life, and the growing bustle of the early day. Maud was not kneeling now; she was alternately smoothing her husband's pillow, and administering spoonfuls of some liquid. And Robert was awake, and in his right mind; the terrible fever was gone. The nurse, who was skilful and experienced, whispered to Anne, "He has

got the turn ! He is stronger than I hoped to see him ; he may recover yet, if God please."

Anne could only cry quietly, and watch in silence what was going on about the bed. After awhile she ventured nearer, and her father at once recognised her, and faintly called her by name : "Anne ! is that my daughter Anne ? I thought I saw her standing by me. I thought some one told me she was coming home. Have I not been very ill ?"

"Yes, very ill, dear father ; but you are better now, thank God ! You must be very quiet, you know, for you are as weak as a little baby."

"You must take a little more of this, and then settle down, and try to go to sleep again, sir," said the nurse, in that quiet, but imperative tone which invalids so quickly comprehend, and almost always obey.

"But where is your mamma ? Surely she was here a minute or two ago !" feebly persisted Robert, turning again to his daughter ; for Maud had shrunk away behind the curtain, and Anne perceived that she was trembling from head to foot.

"Here I am, Robert," she said, in a voice almost as extinguished as her husband's. He seemed contented ; his faculties were still too much beclouded for observation, and he did not, of course, notice the altered appearance of his once lovely and imperious Maud. The nurse looked anxiously at her mistress, and she made some pretext for speaking to Anne in the dressing-room.

"Do get your mamma away, Miss Wreford," besought the woman. "She'll break down to a certainty directly, and she ought not to be here a moment longer. She may grow hysterical any moment, or fall into a faint, and that must not be, you know, ma'am. After all, Dr. Summers was right, I do believe, and your poor, dear papa will recover ; but it's a question of life and death even yet, remember ; and if he were thrown back—and the least disturbance would do it—the last chance would be over. Do get Mrs. Wreford out of the room, ma'am, and immediately, if you can. I shall tell her she must go to bed if she is to be of any more use. She is not wanted here now, nor are you, Miss Wreford. I have had my

sleep, as much as I want, sitting in my chair, and the day-nurse and Miss Gresley have both had a long night's rest."

Maud was easily persuaded to leave the sick-room. She rose at once at Anne's entreaty, and went to see if Laura were getting up, and to take the news. Anne did not accompany her; she wanted to think quietly of all that had passed within the last twelve hours, and of all that lay before her. Now, more than ever, it seemed to be her duty to do what she could to ward off the threatened disaster. If she and Mr. Long could only keep things going till the head of the house was once more in his accustomed place, it would be well worth all the trouble and perplexity the effort must require.

Meanwhile Maud and Laura were alone, the former just completing her morning toilet.

"Well—well, Maud?" were all the words her trembling lips could bring themselves to frame; and Maud replied, "He lives, and he will live! God in His mercy did not answer my wicked prayer, Laura. I can rejoice now that Robert's life is spared. God who has, who *will* rescue him from the grave, can give him strength to meet the cruel trial which sooner or later must befall him."

"If Mr. Wreford lives, he will have to know, I suppose. I do not see how it can be kept from him for any length of time. Stephen Mallory might, perhaps, be bought off for awhile, but we should always live in dread of his breaking his part of the compact. Maud, I feel sure he would never keep faith; he would forswear himself at the first opportunity. He would prey upon you till your last resource failed you, and then he would betray you without scruple."

"He shall never have the opportunity. I shall not attempt to buy him off. I could not if I would, for I have very little money in the house, and it may be some days before Robert can draw a cheque. Laura, I have done with crooked ways for ever! God helping me, I will go straight forward on my way, though it be the road to temporal ruin and to death. As soon as Robert is quite out of danger, he shall know the bitter truth. My only sin against him is that I deceived him, as I

deceived Jacob Russell—I concealed the fact of my marriage with Stephen Mallory."

"I don't know but what it will be the best way, after all, Maud! We should have to tell falsehood upon falsehood, to scheme and intrigue and cheat till we were worn and fretted to fiddle-strings; and when exposure came at last—as come it would—we should only be deeper in the mire, and incur severer blame and censure for our pains. But what made you come to this conclusion?"

"Laura, I have been on my knees before God nearly all night. All the prayers that I have missed for so many years of my godless, vain-glorious life, I seem to have offered up since I parted from you at nine o'clock last evening. After I had talked to Anne, and all but betrayed myself—she behaved so kindly and nicely, and looked so pure and good, I felt as if I must die there and then of the despair that filled my heart—I thought of all the flattering, gay friends who had surrounded me ever since my marriage with your cousin, and more especially since Robert took me for his wife, and gave me every luxury and pleasure, and I felt that to no one of these could I turn in my extremity. You only could I trust, and you were powerless to help. Then I said, in the anguish of my soul, 'Vain is the help of man!' I knew that earthly remedy there was none, and I cried to God to save me, even as He saved the perishing and the sorrowful ones of old. I could only say, 'Lord, I deserve Thy just wrath, I deserve all that my sin and my folly have brought upon me, and I am come to Thee now, because I have no mortal comforter, and can expect no human aid. Yet, for Thy mercy's sake, hear me and pity me, and open a way of escape, and let not the innocent suffer on my account.' And then, Laura, I thought how good Christ was to the woman who washed His feet with her tears, and she was '*a sinner*,' and, perhaps, no worse than I! And I remembered how He said to another, whom all men shunned, 'Go, and sin no more.' I felt that I, too, could lay my guilt and my sorrows at His feet—ay, and wash them with floods of bitter tears; and something seemed to tell me that the Lord heard and pardoned, and in His own way would help me, if not to escape the shame and misery, at

least to bear it with meekness and fortitude. I don't know how the night passed, for I took no note of time. It was as if I knelt only a few minutes at Robert's bedside praying for myself and for him, but I was living again through all my life—my wicked, selfish, worldly life, all spent in self-seeking and arrogance and deceit! And I prayed for you, too, Laura—my one faithful friend in the hour of my great need. I prayed God to bless you always, and to reward you as I never can. And I prayed that you might come to Him, not as I came, in dust and ashes and misery, as a last resource, but in the days of pleasantness and prosperity, giving yourself freely to the Lord."

Laura's eyes were filled with tears, and she said, "Maud, I do think I have been a great and impious sinner. Not that I ever did any great harm to any one, but that I have lived till now with scarce a thought of God, and without any attempt to serve Him. I, too, have been vain and selfish, and careless of good things. I don't think, though, I shall ever be the same again; the old ways, the old aims and ends, the old enjoyments, can never satisfy me more. Perhaps we may both make a new beginning, and so come at last, by God's help, to be true Christian women, doing our work in the world, and living simply and worthily before men."

"I think you have done your work in the world by helping me," said Maud, tenderly. "You have proved, Laura, that you are made for something better than frivolity and vain pleasure. Only a true-hearted, noble-minded woman could have acted as you have since my trouble came upon me. God will bless you for it. He will say some day, 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto Me.'"

Then the two women kissed each other, and wept together, but not for sorrow alone. The tears they shed were not all bitter, for there were in them a comfort and a healing balm they had never known before.

"A broken and a contrite heart *He* will not despise," whispered Maud, as she went away to her own room.

On her way thither, she turned and visited the deserted nursery. How empty, how bare, it looked, though all the usual furniture was in its place, and the walls were gay

with the coloured prints Robert had put up with his own hands to please his darling boys. But there was no fire in the grate ; a heap of playthings on a shelf was covered over ; on the mantel-piece were toys and medicine-bottles side by side. Robin's rocking-horse stood quietly in the accustomed corner, and Freddy's cradle was close to it, the little bedding and the curtains all taken away, for the doctor had ordered them to be destroyed lest they should impart infection. Worst of all, there was utter silence, where six weeks before there had been childish voices and pretty baby-prattle.

Maud sat down and looked at the empty cradle and the useless rocking-chair, but she wept no longer. "It was best so, best in every way, my dear little ones," she murmured to herself ; "your wrongs could never have been redressed ; there would have been the ban upon you all your lives. God took you to Himself, and you are safe with Him for ever and for ever. It was the kindest thing He could do, the only way to save you from the shame. Oh ! if He would but give my poor Robert strength and comfort to bear what he must bear ! And He *will*—I am sure He will. I begin now to understand what trust in God really means. As for myself, I leave all with Him who is mighty—ay, *Almighty* ! A host of cruel, wicked men are helpless in His hands. Surely, He will confound their devices and break their snares. Some day I shall be free and happy once more ; in death, if not in life. It will all be as God pleases ; what He wills must be best. No ; I care no more about myself ; if only—only I could save my poor, injured, innocent Robert ! If he had died, Stephen Mallory might have done his worst."

In that bitter hour, in the cold, empty nursery, with the rain pattering on the window-pane, and the wild autumn winds wailing around the roof, Maud first learned something of the sublime calm and the ineffable sweetness that spring from genuine self-surrender.

CHAPTER XLVII.

B R O U G H T T O B A Y .

IT was about eleven o'clock on the following morning. Mr. Wreford was certainly no worse, if not greatly better. Anne was at the office in Fenchurch Street, Laura had gone for a walk in Kensington Gardens, and Maud was in attendance on the invalid. It was a pleasant October day. The sun shone brightly in a pale but clear blue sky ; the rain had ceased twelve hours or more, and the wind was blowing freshly, yet softly, from the north-west. It was just the sort of morning that we welcome so gladly, as a last memento of the sweet, dead summer that is past, and as a harbinger of more bright days and new spring flowers, when once more the winter shall have gone back to the ice-caves and snow-world of the frozen North.

Maud sat quietly by the fire, pale and sad and worn, but no longer crushed under the burden of her despair. She had a little needlework in her hands, but every few moments it dropped into her lap, and she looked tenderly and anxiously at the thin, white face upon the pillows. The day-nurse came in from the dressing-room, where she was making herself a cup of tea, with—" You are wanted, if you please, ma'am."

" Yes, nurse ; take my place," and Maud went out to the stair-head, where the butler awaited his mistress. " What is it, Prance ? Who wants me ? "

" A gentleman, ma'am—that is to say, a person. I told him, of course, that you saw no one, but he would not be denied. He said he was quite sure that you would see him, as he was a very old friend, reported for years to be dead—killed by a railway accident in America, I think he said, but all a foolish mistake ! "

" Did he give no name ? "

" He had no card, but he told me to say, ' Mr. Marvel, formerly of Myrtle Villa, Stoke Newington.' Says I to

him, 'My mistress does not see any one at present, neither friends nor tradesfolks, but only the doctors, for the master has been at the point of death, and is by no means out of danger, and the nursery at the top of the house is empty; there have been two funerals from this door very lately; ' and says he, ' I quite understand, my man, but I *must* see your mistress on business of the utmost importance. At any rate, you can go to her with my name, and if she won't grant me an interview, why she won't! I think she will, though, when you tell her who I am, and that I must at once take measures if we cannot arrange that little business that she knows of agreeably to all parties.' And I answers, ' If it's about money—if it's a bill, the cash is safe, but nothing can't be settled while things are as they are. It isn't a time for tradesmen that have made no end of profits out of the family to come bothering.' And I would have shut the door in his face, when he says, ' I'm no tradesman, as you might see for yourself, if you had eyes in your stupid head, you blockhead.' I did feel wounded, ma'am, for I never was so impertinently accosted in my life; and he goes on—' It's nothing whatever to do with any bill. It's private business that it will be ruin to neglect another day. Just you go to your lady, and say as Mr. Marvel—Mr. *Stephen* Marvel, late of Myrtle Villa, must have some talk with her.' So I came accordingly, ma'am, thinking you would use your own judgment; and he's in the morning-room. There's nothing there of any consequence, for I'd just taken the silver into my own pantry."

"Very well, I will see this person. You did quite right to come to me, Prance."

For one instant Maud paused before the closed door of the morning-room, and her heart went up, ' In this hour of my great tribulation, good Lord and Saviour, deliver me.' Full well she knew who was Mr. Marvel, of Myrtle Villa; for in that dismal, tumble-down little tenement, her first bridal days had been passed. Another minute, and she stood face to face with the man whose lawful wife she was—the man who had wrought her misery and her earthly ruin.

There he was, just as she had seen him in the Hay-market Theatre, slovenly, insolent, bold, with a cruel, devilish smile on his thin, straight lips, that seemed formed only to speak words of falsehood and sarcasm and blasphemy. He was silent as she entered, but the mocking look she knew so well of old was on his countenance. "What do you want here, Stephen Mallory?" she said, so calmly and gravely that her enemy quailed for the moment in pure astonishment. This was not the passionate, wildly-complaining, loudly-reproachful Matilda of former days. But he speedily rallied his forces, and replied with a coolness that exceeded hers, "Rather a curious greeting, is it not, from the wife of one's bosom, when one comes back from the grave, as it were, after —really I forget how many years of separation? Is it ten or twelve years since 'we two parted, in sorrow and tears,' my beloved Matilda? You do not seem quite overcome with joy, dear partner of my luckless fortunes."

"Again I ask you why you are here, in Mr. Wreford's house?" was her quiet reply.

Then he spoke out savagely, "Because I want my faithless, runaway wife, madam! because I mean to make her *pay* for the pretty freaks she has played during the absence of her liege lord and master. Yes, Matilda Mallory! we two have an account to settle, and the sooner we understand each other the better for both of us."

"Precisely. Therefore I ask you what you want?"

"I believe our mutual, charming friend, Miss Knell, was good enough to convey to you my ultimatum—five hundred pounds *down* this very hour, five thousand pounds more within a fortnight from this day."

"I thought you said you wanted *me*?"

"Want *you*, indeed! Not a bit of it; you've grown as lean and sallow and ugly as sin! But I want the money, and I'll have it, or—you know the alternative, I suppose."

"Name it, if you please."

"Curse you, Matilda Mallory," he shouted furiously.

Maud sickened as the foul speech fell on her ear, so long unaccustomed to profane language; but she answered, still calmly, "Your wicked words cannot harm me, but God takes account of them, and they are even now regis-

tered against you. No man can work another human creature's damnation or salvation. My fate in this world and in the next is fixed by God Himself. Your oaths are horrible, but as regards me mere empty sounds; it is yourself whom they condemn."

He replied only by fresh imprecations, to which his auditor answered, "If you have nothing better to say, I will leave you. I am much occupied at present."

"Don't be such a fool!" he cried, changing his tactics. "You know you always did provoke me to swear at you, Tillie! I never could stand your provoking *insouciance* and assumed *sang-froid*. Rail at me if you will; but don't stand there as cold as a statue, and as proud and impassive as a tragedy-queen. Tell me, now, ain't you my lawful wife?"

"I believe I am—unhappily."

"And I find you living with this man Wreford, and calling yourself by his name. Why! you have twice committed bigamy."

"That is pure nonsense. You can call my miserable mistake what you like; but you know that I was certified of your death. You know that you gave yourself out as *killed*, and you caused what seemed like undoubted evidence of the supposed fact to be forwarded to me when I made the inquiry. You did me the shamefulst wrong that lay in your power. I can forgive your cruel desertion, your harsh usage, your dreadful insults, even your forcing me into seeming complicity with yourself and your wretched comrades; but only as I hope to be forgiven by my Maker can I bring myself to pardon the vile fraud you practised on me when you contrived to make me believe that I was a widow, and free to wed again when and where I chose."

"You may keep your pardon to yourself. I can bear your resentment and your upbraidings, my quondam charmer. Pray speak your mind with all that delightful candour which, in humbler circumstances, procured you many a chastisement. I can't very well beat you now; but I mean to have that money, or—you'll see what you will see, sweet Matilda!"

"I have no money to give you, and I would not give it to you if I had it."

"That's very fine, indeed! That remains to be proved, my goddess. But if you have no money—a statement which you must excuse my fully crediting—you can get it. The mistress of such a mansion cannot be reduced to absolute scarcity of the needful; there must always be ways and means. You can draw upon your banker, I suppose; or your pretended husband's head man in Fenchurch Street can find you the necessary funds. Don't you know that where there's a will there is a way?"

"I do. But in this case the will is wanting."

"What the — do you mean by talking that confounded rubbish? Will or no will, the way must be found. Folks in this wicked world have to do things *against* their will, occasionally. Eh, my lady Matilda?"

"Mr. Mallory, you say you wish that we should understand each other. Your meaning is pretty plain to me, I think. You demand *hush-money* to the amount of £5,500, on receipt of which you promise to relieve me of the inconvenience of your legal claims as my lawful husband, and to maintain the strictest secrecy as regards my former relations with yourself—'to disappear,' in fact, according to Miss Knell."

"Right as a trivet, Tillie! Your perspicacity does you credit. I always said you had the making of a first-rate business woman in you. Give me the *rhino*, and I'll give you a full quittance of all your conjugal duties. I'll go and die again, if you like; but I'll swear never to come to life again, never to cross your path, never to interfere with you in the remotest degree. Should a luckless destiny chance to throw us together, I vow I'll stare at you as if you were as great a stranger to me as the witch of Endor. The cash once in my possession, you are as free as if you had never worn wedding-ring of mine. You may live happily with the *pseudo*-husband of your choice, and forget that such an unfortunate individual as Stephen Mallory ever lived. Could anything be fairer?"

"Could anything be fouler? It is your turn now to listen to me. Not one sovereign will you receive from me. I reject your infamous proposals. Claim me if you will, but I will never live under the same roof with you. You may denounce me, you may kill me, you may cover

me with disgrace, you may do your very worst—but place myself again in your power, and at your mercy, I never will. You chose yourself to sever the tie between us; nothing can reunite us, even in outward seeming."

"We shall see! Any court of justice would compel you to submit to my rightful authority. Why, I could prosecute you for bigamy, if I pleased."

"You would not please; for you would cut but a poor figure before any tribunal. I can prove your imposition; the forged documents are in my possession. The world, which is so fond of casting stones, would blame me for imprudence, and for the more flagrant fault of marrying Mr. Russell in my maiden name; but you it would condemn as the veriest wretch and villain in existence. Besides, it would be the extremity of indiscretion to bring yourself before the public. Fancy how Scotland Yard would bestir itself when it knew that a certain fugitive criminal who has been 'wanted' for the last ten years was at length within its grasp! You call yourself 'Marvel' now, it seems; but only as 'Stephen Mallory' can you proceed against your recusant wife. I think you will not please to prosecute me for bigamy, or to take any steps whatever for my reclamation."

"Are you not afraid I should shoot you on the spot, you bragging fool?" he cried, in a paroxysm of rage. "What's to hinder me killing you as you stand?"

"God will hinder you. And I am afraid of nothing now; death is not a thing so terrible."

"If I let you live, do you imagine it will be for him—that fellow upstairs? If I don't denounce you in open court, he shall know what a fine bargain he made when he stood with you at the so-called marriage-altar. The play is played out, madam; ere he is many hours older, Mr. Wreford shall know that you are no wife of his; and if he is the decent and virtuous gentleman the world affirms him to be, I should think you will be in a dilemma. But once more I offer you the alternative—give me four thousand pounds, and your precious Robert shall never hear of my existence, nor doubt his own position as a respectable married man."

"I will not give you four thousand pence! and Robert

will hear the whole truth from my lips as soon as he is able to bear it; if, indeed, that time should ever come. Even yet, God may take him from the sorrow and the shame; if death do not part us, duty will. Our children are gone; we have only to consider ourselves—Robert and I—and I know he will not wish to keep me with him when he knows that I am not his wife. He will be kind and generous; he will always care for me—if, indeed, he can forgive the deceit I practised towards him in my false account of my life previous to my marriage with Jacob Russell. But we must *part*, cost what it may. He will do the right; I—I must bear the trial, bitter though it be. God will give me strength to endure to the end. He who has helped me so far will never leave me, nor forsake me."

He had literally nothing to reply. The weapons were taken from his hands. He dared not proclaim his supposed wrongs in public court; he dared not let it be bruited abroad that Stephen Mallory was in the country; he dared not pursue any open course; all he could hope was to frighten or to persuade her into bribing him to secrecy. If once he could bully or seduce her into giving him a sum of money, however small, his hold on her would be safe and sure. She seemed impracticable; yet he did not quite despair. He would bend her to his purpose yet, he told himself. She could not escape him; and as for making a full and free confession to Mr. Wreford! "tell that to the marines" was his private comment.

"Well!" he said, at last, "I've had wonderful patience with you, Tillie, but I will give you another chance. Just look about you! This is a pleasant and elegant sort of room, and I dare say the whole house is to match—'replete with every comfort and convenience,' as the advertisements say! You'll miss your pretty things and your little luxuries when you are no longer Mrs. Wreford. You'd better think twice before you make me your implacable enemy. Treat me liberally, and I am your friend for life, and there's no hitch possible in your affairs. You are Mrs. Wreford, petted and feted and courted, to the very end of the chapter. Contemplate the aspect of the position I offer you, and that which you *fancy*

you prefer. Don't be Quixotic ! but be a reasonable woman. Save yourself and Mr. Wreford a world of misery, and do me a good turn into the bargain. I'll come again in two or three days' time. I have special business at Avonport, and I must be there to-morrow night. This is Wednesday—let me see !—I may be detained till Friday ; I shall return to London on Saturday morning. I'll give you till next Monday, then I'll call again, hoping to find you in a more complacent frame of mind."

"I warn you that it will be in vain. I am not bound to receive you. I may bid my servant refuse you admission."

"In which case I shall be under the unpleasant necessity of explaining my business to your servant ; and Miss Knell, you know, is a sad chatterbox. I think you *will* receive me, and I hope we shall settle it all most amicably."

"I promise nothing," said Maud, wearily ; "if you come, however, I will see you." At least there would be some respite if he went away now, and time would be gained, at any rate. Who could say what might happen before next Monday !

"*Au revoir*, then, my dear Matilda," said the scoundrel, in his usual jaunty fashion. "What ! you won't shake hands ! Now, I don't call that Christianlike—that's bearing malice ! *Au revoir, au revoir !*" and he bowed himself out while he was speaking.

Maud told Laura all that had passed, and she commended her resolution ; "and it's time gained, you know," she added. "It's always a good thing to gain time when one is driven to extremity."

"Even now," said Maud, solemnly, "I think God will deliver me from this wicked man, against whom I have not sinned consciously. God will interpose on my behalf, or He will give me all the strength I need."

The next evening Robert was much better, and Maud was sitting downstairs, busy with her long-neglected accounts ; Laura was helping her. The door-bell rang long and loudly, in spite of all its mufflings, and the startled women looked at each other in silent consterna-

tion. That sort of ring always betokens the advent of news extraordinary.

Prance entered, salver in hand. "A telegram for you, ma'am," he said; "the boy is waiting for an answer."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

AT CARBRIDGE JUNCTION.

THE telegram was sent by a certain Dr. Judkin, and addressed to "Mrs. Matilda Wreford." It was very simply worded: "On receipt of this, come immediately to Carbridge Junction. Railway accident. Stephen Marvel dangerously injured."

Maud and Laura read it together, and then looked at each other in breathless, mute inquiry. Meanwhile, Prance calmly waited for the answer. "What am I to say to the telegraph-boy, ma'am?" he inquired. And then Mrs. Wreford roused up, and said, "Tell him to wait two minutes, Prance; I will see him myself." The man departed, and Laura at once began: "Whatever is to be done, Maud! You cannot go, you know; it's impossible."

"I think I had better go, Laura; I *must* go. Suppose he should be dying!"

"No such luck, I am afraid. There! I did not mean to say anything so wicked, though it would set matters straight again, as nothing else could. But suppose it is only a *ruse* of his to get you into his power?"

"It is not impossible; he is ready for any kind of stratagem; only he would gain nothing by taking violent possession of myself. Besides, there would be two words to any scheme of that kind. I am not one to be caught and tethered like a silly, tame animal, and he knows that. I will speak to the telegraph-messenger; he will almost certainly know whether there has been an accident on the line or not."

"To be sure he will!" And the ladies went out into the hall, and soon learned that tidings had reached Paddington of a dreadful accident; "some unaccountable blunder, wrong signals, or something, and the most awful collision as ever was! lots of people killed, and a lot more wounded!"

Maud at once despatched the return message, "Coming!" and then she ran upstairs to prepare for the journey, while Laura looked out the train by which she must travel.

"You will have time for some supper," she said, when Maud came down cloaked, and bag in hand. "There is no train stopping at Carbridge till the one that starts at 11.35. It is of no use going to tire yourself to death, and catch cold at the station; you had better take off your bonnet."

Maud did as she was directed, after a glance at the time-table, which convinced her that Laura had made no mistake; but she chafed terribly at the delay. Having resolved to undertake the expedition, she was irritably anxious to be on the move; she feared lest either courage or strength, or both, should fail her, and, if she waited at home another half-hour, Anne would be returning from the office, and it would be needful to give some explanation of her meditated flight.

"I do not think I can stay quietly here, Laura," she said, after a few minutes had passed; "I would rather go at once to the station, and I think I'll walk; it is a very fine night; it will be a relief to be actually moving."

"I will go with you, then; I can come back in a cab."

"Yes, you can. I do feel as if I had scarcely sense enough to take my ticket. Let us go at once, dear. No! I could not touch sandwiches; put out the wine and the biscuits, and I think I will fill my little silver flask with brandy; there is no knowing what emergencies may present themselves."

In five minutes the ladies were walking quickly towards Westbourne Terrace. The night was cold, but fine; the roads were tolerably dry, and the stars shone clearly overhead. Maud could breathe better in the open air, and the north-west breeze blowing in her face seemed to restore

her strength and reanimate her spirits. She walked so fast that Laura had to beg her to moderate her speed. "I beg your pardon," she replied, "but I feel as if I could walk to Carbridge Junction, now I have once set out. Robert will miss me, though!"

"Perhaps not to-night. I must think of some excuse just to pacify him, if he should ask for you."

"Don't tell a lie."

"What can I say? It will not do to agitate him. Can I not say you are tired and poorly? I am sure you are."

"Well, yes; you might tell him I have a bad headache; that is simple truth. And you may say I asked you to bid him good-night for me. I would not even so far deceive him; but it would be his death if he only guessed at the facts of the case. If he found out, even, that I was not in the house, it might excite him, and bring back the fever. But what will you say to Anne?"

"What shall I say to her? Her first words will be, 'Where is Maud?' She will be at home before I return, and the servants will have told her of the telegram, and of our abrupt departure."

"Suppose you tell her the truth! She will have to know it. As well now as in a week's time! It will be a relief when she is told."

"Oh, Maud! I don't think I can tell her! And you know I *promised*—I took that oath!"

"I release you from it. You have my full permission to tell Anne all—yes, *all*—that you know about Stephen Mallory's reappearance, and my marriage with him before I became Jacob Russell's wife. Ah! there are the station lamps. The booking-office is open; I will take my ticket at once."

"There's a special in ten minutes," said the clerk, as he gave Maud her change. "Ever so many people are going down to the scene of the accident."

"Now, that is an unspeakable blessing!" whispered Maud, as they passed out on to the platform. "I cannot tell you how I dreaded that hour of waiting. See, this is the train."

It was a very short one, but it was carrying down a good many people. A crowd of anxious, grief-stricken men and women were taking their seats; several eminent doctors and their assistants, and half-a-dozen professed nurses, were hastening to the rescue. All the faces looked sad and scared in the dim lamplight. Maud took her seat with two of the nurses in the habit of the Sisterhood to which they belonged; she only hoped they would not expect her to converse. Five minutes more, and the bustle had subsided; the porters closed the carriage-doors as quietly as though the sufferers themselves were inside; the steam-whistle sounded faintly, and the engine gave a puff or two and began to move. As the train dashed away, Laura caught sight of Maud, lying back in her compartment, her hands clasped as if in prayer, and her thick veil covering her face. Then she signalled a cab, and drove back to the house, which seemed now familiar as her parents' home.

Fast flew the special! It only stopped once while the up-express dashed by at a tremendous speed; and Maud shivered as she thought what a collision must be, and what awful and sickening details it must include! In little more than an hour from leaving Paddington, Carbridge Junction was reached, and a crowd of officials were waiting on the platform to receive the anxiously-expected train. Maud turned to the first porter at hand, and inquired for Dr. Judkin.

"This way, ma'am;" and she was led through the booking-office, and out by a private door into the station-yard, where, through the midnight darkness, loomed turn-tables and engines, and rows of shunted carriages, while on the ground was a line of coloured lamps which seemed to be placed as guides in the path they were taking. Two or three minutes brought them to a large, dimly-lighted outbuilding, before which Maud was requested to wait. Through the wide-open doors she could see people moving about quietly but quickly, and on a table, not ten paces from her, lay a *something*, covered with a sheet. The dead as well as the wounded were in this dismal place; she trembled at the thought of what she might have to encounter. Oh! where was Dr.

Judkin? Presently the porter reappeared, and beckoned her into the room where that awful *something* lay. Could that be Stephen Mallory—that motionless, rigid form, with its ghastly outline, in the cold, dim lamplight? No! The dead man was evidently short and slender; perhaps, poor fellow, he was not a man, only a lad, some mother's son and darling! and Stephen Mallory was tall and broadly built.

"You are Mrs. Matilda Wreford?" said a gentle voice at her side, and she turned and saw a fair, youthful face and almost boyish figure. She wondered if this were Dr. Judkin; he looked too young to be a man of much experience, and she felt embarrassed and disappointed. She had somehow pictured to herself the sender of the telegram as a grey-haired, elderly physician. "You are not Dr. Judkin?" she said, hesitatingly.

"Yes, I am. Ah! you expected to see an older man, but I happened to be almost on the spot when the accident occurred, and I am a regular practitioner. When I telegraphed, I was working almost single-handed; now, there are half-a-dozen medical gentlemen present, and two of them have examined Mr. Marvel. Their opinion is precisely that which I formed on the first cursory inspection."

"And that is——?"

"May I ask, dear madam, if you are——?" He hesitated how to phrase the necessary inquiry. Mrs. Matilda Wreford was clearly a lady; she was handsomely, though plainly, dressed; and her manner and whole appearance stamped her as a person of means and of position. Mr. Marvel, on the contrary, was most shabbily attired, and he looked every inch a rascal. The young surgeon was puzzled to determine the connection between his vagabond patient and this stately dame, whom he had himself summoned to the scene of action. Maud perceived his difficulty, and fully understood it. "Mr. Marvel is a relation of mine," she interposed; "a near relation, though he and I met yesterday, for the first time, after many years of separation and silence. Till very lately I had no idea that he was living; long ago he was reported dead, as having died," she added, unconsciously

lowering her voice, "through an accident such as now has *actually* befallen him ! "

"That is strange. This time there is no mistake. He lives, but ——"

"He is dangerously injured, I think your telegram said ? "

"Only that I feared to shock you too greatly, I should have written *fatally* injured. He cannot possibly recover, nor can he be removed to the hospital or to the hotel, like others of his fellow-sufferers. There are only four patients here—only three, I should say. This poor boy"—and he laid his hand on the white-covered form—"died almost as soon as he was brought in."

"How is Mr. Marvel hurt ? "

"In several ways; one leg is *crushed*, and there are cuts and contusions about the head; but the mortal injuries are internal."

"Can nothing be done ? "

"Nothing more than has been already done. It is a case in which medical and surgical skill are powerless, save to alleviate suffering. In a few hours all will be over; in a very short time he will probably sink into unconsciousness. As he appeared to have some communication to make to you, I think there had better be no delay. The final symptoms may disclose themselves at any moment; strength is ebbing fast. I will lead you to him at once, if you feel able to support the interview."

"I am ready," said Maud, faintly; and she turned so white, the young doctor looked at her in some anxiety. He would have taken her aside to regain her composure had he not been aware that every minute was of importance, if the dying man had aught upon his mind to disclose to the lady whose name and address he had given so eagerly. He pointed to an inner room, and in another moment Maud was in the presence of the man who, from first to last, had been her evil genius. He was deadly pale, and a curious ashen grey shadow seemed to be stealing over his sharpened features; there was a linen bandage round his temples, and on the bandage several stains of blood. He lay quite motionless on his back, which was well supported by pillows. He could just

move his hands, the lower limbs from the hips downwards were entirely paralysed. The doctor gave him a spoonful of milk and brandy, and left him and Maud together.

"You are here, Tillie!" said Mallory, in a low, unearthly tone, as if he breathed only in his throat. "I thought perhaps you wouldn't come—you seemed to hate me so."

"Can you wonder?"

"Well, candidly speaking, I can't—I don't. I may as well be candid now, I suppose. Those sawbones yonder say I've only an hour or two to live. I shall never see the morning light, they tell me; and one of them wanted to send for a parson, and another hinted that if I had any affairs that could be promptly settled, I'd better lose no time. Well, I've nothing to settle, no affairs of any kind; at any rate, my affairs, such as they are, will settle themselves very comfortably; and as for a parson, I don't want any whining and canting about my soul. But I wanted to see *you*, my lass. You were my wife once, you know; and if I ever did care for any woman it was for you; and I wanted to say I was sorry, and all that, and to hear you say that you'd forgive me. Can you forgive me, Tillie?"

"Yes, I forgive you, Stephen; and may God forgive me for the deceit of which I have been guilty."

"I led you into it; it wasn't your fault. I don't see what else you could do when I left you but begin on a fresh tack. The very name of Mallory was enough to ruin you. I don't blame you, my poor girl. I behaved very badly to you; but the worst turn I ever did you was making believe to be dead—to be killed, just as I am killed now! But it was not quite as bad as it seemed; there *was* a collision on the Grand Trunk, and half-a-dozen folks were smashed upon the spot. Most of them were strangers, unclaimed by any friends. There was a lot of confusion, of course, and a good deal of stupidity; the New World's almost as stupid as the Old, Tillie. I had a hard knock on the head, and when I came to myself I found that I was David Wilkins, and that Stephen Mallory was dead and buried in the Satchewa Cemetery! The thing was done without any trouble of mine; it was

most convenient for me to be dead just then; the police don't hunt dead men, whatever be the charge against them. So the papers that were sent to you were not forged, after all. There was a blunder, and nobody to blame, as of course I held my tongue, and answered to the name of David Wilkins as pat as if I'd never been called Stephen Mallory.

"Well, Tillie, you know I always liked a choice of names, and, as I was afraid some of the Wilkins family might take the trouble to look up their unfortunate kinsman, and so find out the mistake, I christened myself afresh, and became Joseph Saunders. I never meant to bother you again; but when, after some years, I found it expedient to return to Europe, I couldn't help being curious as to your whereabouts; and when I found out that you were married to a rich man, the devil entered me, I suppose, and I began to think what a nice little piece of business I might do if I could only make you pay well for my keeping *mum*. It was a good while before I discovered who and what you really were. It was your first marriage with old Russell that I knew of; I knew nothing whatever of Robert Wreford. While I was in Paris, just two months ago, I heard that the old buffer had been dead for seven years, or more, and that you had subsequently married a rich London merchant, and were living in great style at the West End.

"The worst of it was, I could not anyhow learn your new husband's name; it was quite by accident I found out that Russell was dead and you remarried. I had no clue whatever; but I determined to hunt till I found you, and I had no sooner returned to England than, as luck would have it, I saw you that night with another lady, in the Haymarket Theatre. I rushed on your trail at once, but too late; you got the start of me, and I lost the scent entirely. After that I haunted every place of amusement, and all the West End churches and chapels; but never caught a glimpse of you. I was almost in despair, when one day I saw the young lady who was with you in the theatre, and, thinks I, 'if I can but follow this girl to her home, I can get upon Tillie's track. Perhaps the two live together!' But missie gave me the slip, though I thought

once I'd got her, sure as fate; she recognised me, I suppose. Only the next day, who should I run against in St. Paul's Churchyard, but that old cat, Jane Knell, and she knew me as soon as ever she set eyes upon me. I haven't breath to tell you what passed between us; but from what followed you may guess. She undertook my job, and all the rest, you know; and if Mr. Wreford hadn't fallen ill with fever, I believe I should have made my little game. And that's all, Tillie, and I wish I hadn't done it now, and I'd like to hear you say again, plain out, 'Old fellow, I forgive you!'"

"I do forgive you, Stephen; but oh! never mind me. Think of God, whom you have so grievously offended and defied. A few more hours, perhaps less, and you must appear before the Judge. Beseech Him now, for Christ's sake, to pardon all your sins."

"I never did believe in death-bed repentances, Tillie; and I don't *now*. I'm sorry, because I can't help myself. If I got out of this scrape, I dare say I should only get into another; and seeing how much harm I might do to innocent people, I think it's high time the Almighty put a stopper on me. If I'd a chance in another world, I *might* do; but I never shall in this. I've been wicked too long; and that God, to whom I'm going, knows all about it. He knows I never had a real good chance in all my life. I was born bad. I was born in prison—*there!* I never told any one that before, Tillie. My mother was a lost woman, and my father—I never knew him—was a high-born scoundrel! If ever man worked out his own damnation, he did! No! I never had a chance! My only inheritance was the vices of my parents, and a large sum of money, the wages of iniquity, without which I had, perhaps, done better. I was born bad, bred bad; and I've lived bad, and am dying bad."

"No, no! not all bad! You do feel remorse; you would undo the past, if possible?"

"I'm not sure that I would. I'd undo some of the consequences, but I can't. I'd cancel my sin against you if I could, but it's too late—too late. Still, if you could manage to shut Jane Knell's ugly mouth, you might hold your own, and no one ever be the wiser."

"I shall not try. I have done with crooked ways for ever. Robert shall know the truth at any cost. Could I live with him—if he recover—and know him to be *not* my lawful husband? Could I risk bringing into the world another child who had no legal right to his father's name? No, Stephen; I will deceive no longer. I will live as a Christian woman should, or not at all. It is strange, though, that to you I owe my conversion, if such it may be called!"

"Strange enough! But it's no merit of mine. Let it be, however. I'm glad to have done one good work, though I never meant it. And that's all, Tillie. Would you mind giving me one good-bye kiss before you go?"

Maud bent down and kissed the cold lips that would deceive no more. "I shall not leave you," she said, "till—all is over!"

"Thank you. This is more than I deserve. It won't be long; you may go back and breakfast with your husband, for he *is* your husband before God! I hope you will be happy with him for many a year to come. You had better get married over again, though. That grand wedding of yours was nothing but a sham; in point of law not worth a rap! You had best put things all square and ship-shape as soon as ever you are able."

"Of course," said Maud, quietly. At the same time she wondered, with a sharp pain at her heart, whether Robert would care to put things all square! Would he not at once cast off the woman who had deceived him, rather than go through the marriage ceremony with her again? Would he not think himself well quit of one who had wedded him to disgrace and shame? Would he ever, if they remained together, put faith in her any more?

"Do you suffer?" she asked, as a slight convulsion ran through the frame of the dying man.

"Scarcely at all," he answered, dreamily. "I feel numbed and lifeless, that is all. My heart beats a little; I can think still; but a good deal of me is dead already, I fancy. If they cut my legs off, I should not feel it. My heart beats slower and slower; it will stop presently, and then *I* shall be dead."

It was exactly as he said ; he was fast relapsing into insensibility, and when Dr. Judkin came back to the bedside, he saw that it was useless to attempt to administer the stimulant he brought. "He will never speak again ; he will not breathe much longer," said the young man. "Shall I lead you, madam, to the hotel, where some other ladies are ? One of the nurses can take your place."

But Maud replied that she would remain at her post. She would stay with her unfortunate relative till all was over ; a stranger should not close his eyes. Dr. Judkin bowed and withdrew ; he had no time to spare for the living while the dying were all around him. And there were some whom his skill and tendance yet might save. Maud kept her seat, and now and then a nurse came to her, and inquired if she could be of any use. One of them brought her a little wine and water and a feather to moisten the lips of the sufferer, but there was nothing further to be done till the last sad offices were needed. Gradually the quiet form grew colder and stiller, the breath was fainter and fainter, the shadows deepened on the grey set face. As Maud and one of the nurses watched, a sort of thrill passed over the features, there was a little fluttering sigh, and Stephen Mallory was *dead*, nevermore to weave his webs of wickedness and fraud. At last, Maud was free.

She went away for a little while, and when she came back again the corpse was straightened for the grave. She sighed heavily as she looked on the dead man, whose life had been the curse of her womanhood, and murmured, "God forgive you, poor Stephen, even as I forgive you ! It is all ended now ; I can only leave you in His hands. Now, I know there is no one between me and Robert—but oh ! will he ever forgive me ? Ah ! need I now confess all ? Yes ! I shall never be happy till the truth is told ; besides, by this time, Anne knows. I am glad of that—glad that I cannot yield to temptation, glad that I *must* speak, whatever may befall."

Once more she asked for Dr. Judkin, and begged him to order all that was necessary for a quiet, respectable funeral. "I will be answerable for all expenses," she

said. "I suppose there is no reason why I should remain here any longer?"

"None whatever," he replied. "There is nothing you would wish to be stated on the inquest?"

"Nothing; the less said the better. You know how he died, and the cause of his death, and that, I suppose, is all that is required by coroner and jury. As far as I know, he has not a relative in the world except myself; and, as I told you, I had counted him dead for years. His has been a sad life; but let the grave cover all. It is best that all memory of him should perish."

There was an up-train to Paddington at six o'clock, and before nine Maud was once more at her own door. Laura met her with anxious gaze. "Was it all true, Maud? Was he really so badly hurt?"

"All true, Laura; and it is all over! He is gone; I saw him die—I saw him ready for his coffin! This time there is no deception—I am really free!" And poor, worn-out, over-wrought Maud burst into hysterical tears. Laura led her away to her room, and at once undressed her and put her, like a tired child, to bed.

"To think," said Miss Gresley, "that, after all, he died exactly as he pretended to die ten years ago! I wonder whether it was not a judgment on him for his wickedness to you?"

"Hush!" sobbed Maud. "He was wicked enough, God knows; but I cannot talk about it. He is gone to his account; we will not upbraid him any more, dear Laura."

CHAPTER XLIX.

ROBERT of course knew nothing of Maud's night-journey; he simply supposed that she had gone to bed with one of the bad nervous headaches from which she occasionally suffered. He was not even surprised when she did not

come to him, as usual, next morning, though as the day wore on, and she failed to make her appearance, he began to feel uneasy.

"She is very poorly," said Laura; "she has borne up so well, and now she is just dead beat. Let her have a day's rest, Robert, and I dare say she will be all right to-morrow."

"She must need many days' rest," he replied. "My poor Maud! what a terrible time she must have had of it! And you, too, Laura. I wonder I have not killed you all. Where is Anne?"

"She is in the City. Mr. Long asked her to help him with some accounts. I believe Anne has become quite a business-woman."

"Then the dream of other years is accomplished, and I, after all, had nothing to do with it. I suppose old Long would not act entirely on his own responsibility; he never would stir an inch without full orders. I expect Anne has had to play at being my *locum tenens*."

"I don't know; but I fancy it has been something more than play. She has been at it all the week—ever since Tuesday morning, that is; she came home in a cab ever so late last night, and regularly tired out."

"I wonder how things are going on in Fenchurch Street! Now I come to recollect, several good business-houses were in a peck of trouble. Something was said about the Prendergasts. Are they all right, do you know, Laura?"

"I dare say they are; I have heard nothing to the contrary." A truthful statement enough, since Miss Gresley had not the least idea who the Prendergasts were, and Anne and her coadjutor had kept all their anxieties to themselves.

The terrible disclosure had been made, and Anne knew now what it was that had pressed so heavily on her step-mother's mind during her father's all but fatal illness. She scarcely wondered that poor Maud could not bring herself to pray for the life of him who was her husband, and yet not her husband. It was a most horrible complication, and Maud was both sinned against and sinning—yes, sinning! though deeply wronged, for she had cruelly

deceived both Robert Wreford and Jacob Russell by the concealment of her previous marriage with Mr. Mallory. And deceit of any kind was most abhorrent to Anne's nature.

"She must have told no end of untruths," she said, when she quite comprehended her step-mother's unfortunate dilemma. "A hundred things flash through my mind that must have been entirely false."

"Don't be hard upon her, Anne," pleaded Laura ; "she has suffered so bitterly! How bitterly no one but myself knows. It must have been a sort of hell upon earth for her, ever since that night in the Haymarket; and, indeed, it has not been much better for myself. This sort of thing always does come out, you know; and I knew we were in the power of an unprincipled wretch, who had yielded himself to the devil from his youth. I wonder if he is very much hurt! I wonder if he will recover! I wish I had thought of asking Maud to telegraph!"

"It is dreadful to wish for any one's death; and yet this man seems to be a sort of Mephistopheles, who will work nothing but wickedness and misery to everybody as long as he is in this world. Thank you for telling me, Laura; I am glad I know the secret. Once, for a few minutes, I thought it might be worse even than it is."

"How could it be worse?"

"Maud, in her agony that night, spoke of disgrace—of *shame*! I was afraid there was some one she preferred to father, and that people knew it—that he knew it himself; that he would have to take steps against her as soon as he was able, if he lived. I was afraid that she might be in the last degree unworthy to stand in my own dear mother's place."

"You wronged her, Anne! You wronged her greatly. Maud has never been guilty of any indiscretion. Her worst folly was her marriage with that Mallory; her utmost sin against your father was the entire concealment and falsifying of that portion of her history which extends from the death of the woman who brought her up till her marriage with my mother's second cousin, Jacob Russell. She is much to be pitied; don't turn against her, Anne."

"I will not; I will befriend her if I can. I am very

sorry for her. She never knew a mother, poor thing; and that Colonel, if he were her father, was worse than none. He never owned her. The consequence of others' sins seemed to be her birthright; it must have been an awful situation for her, left friendless and penniless in Paris, and she so young and beautiful. And, of course, that man Mallory was an arch-deceiver, and made her believe that he was, at least, reputable, and in love with her. Almost anybody would be a refuge in her sad circumstances. And then, at last, she had every reason to believe that her husband was really dead, that she was free to form fresh ties, that she might bury the miserable past, and begin her life afresh."

"She had, indeed. The documents forwarded to her bore every mark of being quite genuine; and I believe there is actually a tombstone somewhere in the States, or in Canada, with his name upon it, and the record of his fate, as killed by a railway accident."

"And now, unless he has contrived some new plot, he really is the victim of a railway accident! It is very singular."

"Very singular. I thought so myself the moment I read the telegram. And there undoubtedly is a dreadful accident, for the train Maud went by was special, chartered by the company for the benefit of those who were summoned to Carbridge; and a lot of half-frantic people, and nurses, and doctors, and sisters of mercy, travelled by it."

"And he—that man—is very badly hurt?"

"The telegram said 'dangerously.' But he may be horribly smashed, you know, crippled and maimed for life, and yet live on for years. There are such cases."

"I know there are. We must leave it with God, Laura. He will do what is best for him and for us. It has just struck me that one great wrong was made right in the death of those dear little boys; nothing could have altered *their* position. Oh, what will father say when he knows that those sons, of whom he was so fond and so proud, were what people cruelly call 'basely-born'!"

"You think, then, your father must know whether Mallory die or live?"

"Certainly he must know. Oh, Laura, don't try to tempt Maud back into untruthful ways. Let there be no more subterfuge, no more concealment, no more hateful mysteries. Besides, if Mallory be dead, there must be another marriage. My father must not be imposed on a day longer than is absolutely necessary."

"What do you mean by that?"

"That he must be told as soon as he is able to bear a great shock—and that cannot be for some weeks. It would be murder to tell him now; the least we could expect would be the permanent unsettling of his reason. It is not too late for a relapse either—the doctors say so; and the whole system is so weakened that any kind of blow would almost certainly prove fatal."

"I think Maud means to be quite honest. She will hide nothing; she only waits the time when she may safely speak."

Anne did not see Maud when she returned next morning, for she was just starting for Fenchurch Street; but she left home knowing that the troubler of their household peace had passed away from the world in which he had wrought so much misery and sin. It was several days before she and her step-mother met, and she could not help dreading their first interview. Not all the trouble that had gone before had unhinged Anne as had the terrible revelations made to her by Laura Gresley. She felt *herself* shame-stricken and humiliated, and she could not bear to look at her father, and hear him talk about his wife. How would he bear it—he! the highly-respectable Robert Wreford, of stainless character and unblemished integrity, and almost stern morality—when he came to know that the woman he had so loved and trusted, the mother of his darling boys, had never been his lawful wife?

Oh! that the awful disclosure were made; and oh! that Philip knew all about it! They were going to meet now in a few days, and what a strange lovers' meeting it would be! There would, first of all, be serious business confidences; and when those were fully discussed, there would be this thrice-miserable tale.

Anne was beginning to feel that she could not bear the

strain much longer; she would be ill if Philip were not quickly the sharer of *all* her anxieties. She longed for and yet dreaded the day which was to bring them once more into personal communication.

On the Sunday evening she and Maud had a long conversation, and all shadows of enmity and dislike passed from Anne's heart as she talked with the humbled, faded, stricken woman, whose radiant beauty and imperious bearing had been so conspicuous only a few weeks ago. "I am humbled to the dust," she said, "and I deserve it. Nothing short of sufferings such as I have undergone could drive out of me the evil spirits of pride and selfishness and lying. How badly I behaved to you, Anne! And—though I don't think I quite realised what I was doing—how cruelly I wronged that sweetest of women, your own mother! I was always putting myself into contrast with her. I was always taking advantage of your father's peculiar foibles. Yes! it is quite true. I did mean to be his second wife when she whom I saw slowly fading before my eyes should be gone. His '*second wife*'! He has never had but one wife—his gentle, loving Catherine, who loved him for himself alone; and if I vexed her, if I came between her and her husband, as, by exercising a certain subtle influence, I must have done, she is now fully avenged!—most fully avenged, is she not?"

"It is the last thing *she* would have thought of, to be avenged. Maud, I do think you behaved very ill in those days. I think you tried to serve your own selfish ends, careless of the interests and feelings of other people. I think you married my father for money and for position, and I think you played the syren to perfection. You knew what your loveliness and grace were, and you made a snare of them, and caught him all too readily in your toils. But—you have repented! If you have sinned, you have also suffered. God forbid that I should add my reproaches to stab your deeply-wounded heart. Let us two bury the past; let us henceforth be as sisters, true and loving sisters. Mother and daughter we never were and never can be; I shall not even call you '*mamma*' again; but sisters we may always be, in all but name, and always faithful friends."

"You are too good to me. And you will not take part against me when your father knows that—that I have no legal claim upon him?"

"Indeed, I will not. I will help you all I can. We are going to help each other in everything, are we not? And you don't mind my telling Philip the whole story?"

"No; because I know it will be told impartially; because I am sure of justice at your hands. You may, perhaps, in your great charity, extenuate somewhat; but you will not set down anything in malice. I am content to trust myself to your mercy; and of course Philip, as your husband, would have to know, and the sooner he does know the better. I need not tell you, Anne, to keep no secrets from Philip Rutland. Don't have any reserves ever, if you can help it. Perfect openness on both sides is a wonderful conservator of wedded happiness."

"I believe it, Maud. Philip and I have agreed never to have any secrets from each other; and I hope God will so guide us that no temptations shall ever lead us away from the paths of simplicity and truth."

CHAPTER L.

CHRISTMAS came and went before Robert Wreford knew aught of Maud's wretched story. He gained strength so slowly that all about him dreaded the inevitable disclosure; and Dr. Summers, still in almost daily attendance, continually forbade fatigue or excitement of any kind. All reference to business affairs was strictly prohibited, till one day, when he appeared irritably anxious and nervous, Anne was told that, all things considered, it might be better to speak, but with the utmost caution. Mr. Wreford, who, for the first few weeks of his convalescence, had seemed quite content to let matters in Fenchurch Street take their own course, suddenly

recovered his wonted interest in the money-market, and he evidently began dimly to remember some of the difficulties which were among his last memories of the City. That one allusion to the possible failure of the Prendergast firm was his sole reference to office affairs, and being assured by Laura that all was right, he succeeded in convincing himself that the idea of a panic, still floating in his weakened brain, was but part and parcel of the delirium gradually stealing over him during those last hours in Fenchurch Street. Still, he was restless, and talked of taking a drive into the City ; and when he was besought not to trouble himself just yet about his business, he grew restive, and declared that he had been passive long enough. It would do him good to look over his books, and there must be no end of correspondence, with which Mr. Long would not even attempt to grapple.

Then Anne said, "Father, if you do not object, I will bring Mr. Long home with me to-day to a six o'clock dinner, and, between us, I think we can explain everything to your satisfaction."

"Why cannot you tell me what you have been doing yourself ? I never worked harder than you have done, according to appearances, ever since the end of October, or thereabouts."

"I would rather Mr. Long and I explained things mutually. We shall be able to smooth over and excuse each other's peccadilloes, you know. Of course, we have made some blunders—I especially, though Philip will have it I am the more sagacious business man of the two. He thinks dear, good Mr. Long very trustworthy, very faithful, but just a little too cautious—a little too much afraid of taking the initiative."

"Very well ! bring Mr. Long, then, and be sure to bring also those books and that case of papers I mentioned yesterday. The brougham shall be sent for you early. I should like a long evening with friend Ebenezer. I declare, Anne, it does me all the good in the world to think about invoices and bills of lading and crabbed rows of figures once again. My day-book and my ledger will be more beneficial to me than all Dr. Summers' nostrums and tonics and regulation diet."

"Well, Miss Anne, I think we need not be ashamed of

ourselves!" said the old clerk, when she told him of the arrangements for the evening. "We've tided it over pretty respectably, I think. Some things have gone to the bad, I know, but we've saved our credit, we've weathered the storm, and we are beginning the New Year more hopefully than I expected. But I never could have done it without *you*, Miss Wreford! It's a thousand pities you are not a lad. You really *ought* to be in the firm. I don't see why you shouldn't be a partner in a year or two."

"Well! you see, Mr. Long, I have promised to be Mr. Philip Rutland's partner, and my father has given his consent. And one partnership is enough for a woman."

"Ah, well, Miss Anne, if it must be, it must be! I could almost find it in my heart to wish Mr. Philip had never made your acquaintance. If you were only a young gentleman, now, 'Wreford and Son' would come naturally. Or, if the Lord had but seen fit to spare little Master Robin; the years soon go round, and a child grows up before you're aware of it."

That night Robert was both astonished and well pleased. Mr. Long had not boasted when he said that he and Anne had tided over the difficulty. They had done more; they had met the crisis boldly, and things were not nearly as bad as might have been expected. "I don't say but what there is a good deal of shakiness still," said Mr. Long, "and there's a general want of confidence, of course, and there will be more crashes yet; but I think the worst is over; and as regards £ s. d., we shall recoup ourselves in course of time. It's been a bad year, of course—a dreadful bad year! even for those who, like ourselves, have kept their heads above water. But, as I say, it might have been far worse; it would have been but for Miss Wreford. And when so many have gone down in the storm, it doesn't become us to make our moan, because some of our ballast is washed overboard."

"No, indeed! With all my heart, I thank you, Mr. Long, for what you have done, and I thank my daughter. I scarcely know to which I am the more grateful. She would have been powerless unless you had acted with her; and you, I know, would never have taken certain critical

steps if she had not been at your right hand ready to endorse your judgment."

Later in the evening Philip arrived, and Anne claimed for him much of the praise which her father had bestowed upon herself ; "for," said she, modestly, "I was a good deal at sea till I could put things clearly before Philip. His advice was most valuable, and at the worst, an inexpressible comfort ; for I was clever enough to comprehend how a very slight mistake, a little too much rashness, or a little too much caution, might render null and void our very best endeavours. And, of course, there was a great deal which even Mr. Long could not explain, and on which Philip put his own construction, which seems to have been, on the whole, tolerably correct."

And so the old, time-honoured house of Bright and Hankins was saved from bankruptcy ! There would be what Mr. Long called "pull-backs" for several years, there would be some dead losses, there would be unwonted anxieties, and there must be *retrenchments* in the home expenditure ; but still, the firm had preserved its vitality, and no man could lift up his voice and say that it had failed in its integrity. Prudence and patience, and Mr. Wreford's continued industry and wonderful business capacity, would, if Providence pleased, set all right again in the course of a few years.

Mr. Long was quite overcome by his governor's cordiality and affability ; I am not sure that he did not shed tears of happiness as he drove away that night from Hyde Park Gardens, feeling in his heart, too, that he had really earned the right to be considered Robert's trusted and confidential friend.

But Anne and Philip could not rejoice as he did ; the good ship of Mr. Wreford's business had been steered by all three through tempestuous seas, and now it was in comparatively smooth waters again, with a good hope of coming fairly into port. But there was still another and far more terrible crisis to be met, of which the faithful Mr. Long knew nothing. And the time had come when the dreaded communication must be made.

They all, Laura and Philip included, went down to Hastings for a month. Dr. Summers had peremptorily

forbidden Robert to return to business until he had had change of air, and the brace of salt sea-breezes. And it was settled among themselves that before their return he should be told the history of Stephen Mallory, whom, by the way, Philip had no difficulty in identifying with his *mauvais sujet* of *Père la Chaise*.

And as Robert grew stronger and better in every way, as his spirits returned and his intellect regained its wonted clearness, Maud drooped and failed, till he took alarm, and insisted on her seeing a certain celebrated physician, famous for the treatment of *decline*. She only shook her head.

"This is nonsense," said he to Anne. "Don't you see for yourself how fearfully your mamma is altered? Ay, and in something more than bodily health! She won't talk; she is cold and shy; and—and—queer! She is as 'umble as Uriah Heep, and she's got a sort of haunted look. Have you not noticed it, Anne?"

"Yes, father, I have. So we all have, and we are deeply sorry for her."

"What do you mean? Who are 'all'?"

"Philip, Laura, and myself."

"And why are you sorry? Anne! there is more in this than meets my eye. Why do you change colour so, child? There is a secret—I must know it."

"There is a secret, and you must know it. It has only been kept from you on account of your illness and tardy convalescence. We were especially warned to keep everything from you that—"

"Keep it—whatever it is—no longer. Let me know the worst. It concerns my wife?"

"It concerns Maud."

"Are you going to tell me —? No! I can't ask the question that trembles on my lips! I won't believe anything against her! Has she not proved her love, her devoted love, a thousand times over during the last four months?"

"Maud *does* love you, father; and if you are hard with her, if you visit her old sins on her head, you will kill her. She has done wrong, but she has been terribly punished. I only wonder how she has lived through it."

"In three words, say *what she has done*."

"She has falsified a portion of her life; she was married before she ever saw Jacob Russell. He was not her *first* husband."

"Who was, then?"

"Stephen Mallory. A man possessed of the devil, I think. I believe he ought to have died a convict's death."

"He *is* dead! Thank God!"

"Yes, he is dead; but —"

"But he was living when his wife married Jacob Russell?"

"Yes; he was living three months ago!"

"Oh, my God!" cried Robert, covering his face. "What, then, are *we*? And those dear boys—our little ones!"

"Father, be brave. As I tell you, the worst is over. Maud married you, as she married Mr. Russell, in all good faith. She believed herself to be a widow; she had every right to suppose she was free from earlier ties. She is, and ever has been, your wife in God's sight; no real disgrace on that head attaches itself to you or to her. There is only one person in the world besides ourselves—Philip, Laura, and I—who knows anything about it. All you have to do is quietly to marry Maud over again, and no one will ever be the wiser."

"I don't understand it. Anne, I am bewildered—tell me the whole story."

And she told it, from first to last, as she had heard it from Maud and from Laura Gresley. Maud had implored that either she or Laura would undertake the miserable narration. "Tell it for me," she had said, pitifully; "let him know all the facts, and then I will answer truly to any question he may choose to put. But tell him all that miserable story, from first to last, with my own lips, I cannot! I should choke! I should break down into sobs and tears just when it behoved me to be most calm."

When Anne was silent, her father said: "To think that disgrace should come to my door! that I, of all men, should be involved in so wretched and scandalous a matter! I, who have never swerved either to the right hand or to the left! I, whose whole life has been open to the world! I, who have gloried in irreproach-

able conduct, to whom no social blame has ever been attached; and now—this woman, with whom I have lived happily for the last three and a half years, and the mother of my dead sons, confesses that she has never been my wife! Anne! I had rather the business had gone to the dogs! I had rather begin over again—a poor man, ruined in all but honour and unsullied reputation. I am not much over fifty; my mental powers, my business capacity, will be intact, as soon as I am a little stronger—I could conquer adverse fortunes—I could regain lost capital—lost everything, but this!—*this*, which can never be retrieved."

"Yes, it can, father. I knew you would feel it acutely; but, as you were guiltless yourself, and as Maud also was cruelly deceived, I do not think you ought to be so utterly hopeless."

"I have no patience with deception. If Maud was deceived, she also deceived—shamefully deceived—both myself and Jacob Russell. Alas! that so fair a form should cover so base a soul! Ah, Anne, I had a treasure once—your precious mother. I had a wife in a thousand; one of the best and sweetest women that God ever made was my own. I had an angel in my house, and I never knew it, till she was leaving me. Anne, I sometimes think I was little better than your mother's murderer, and I let my ambition and my worldliness harden my heart. Her tenderness, her gentle love, I slowly starved to death. She could not live without affection, and she died for lack of it. I said to myself, 'She is a happy and fortunate woman, and I have raised her from a poor, obscure dressmaker to be the wife of a prosperous City merchant, and it is her own fault if she have a wish ungratified.' Fool and self-deceiver that I was! As if position and plenty of money, rich raiment, equipages, and a sumptuous table, could make up to *her* for the affection and tenderness for which she pined! I even took you from her; I condemned her to a bondage of fashion, from which her whole soul revolted, and I let her see and feel continually how poorly she satisfied my requirements. Oh, that she had not died! I might so easily have saved her; she would have thriven upon such

crumbs of kindness as many women would despise. And oh ! that I had never, never seen Maud Russell ! Surely that meeting at Etretat was a punishment for my sins ! ”

“ I would not look upon it in that light, father. I am more glad than I can express that at last I hear you speak of darling mother according to her deserts. She was all—far more than all—you say. But that past cannot be retrieved any more than Maud’s. The best repentance—the only one that God accepts—is the starting afresh, with a determination to do the right, and cease from selfishness. And it is not too late ; you have years of happiness before you, if you will but have it so. God has taught us all so much during the last few months ; shall we not profit from His teaching ? He has shown us our own weaknesses and unwisdom, our hidden, cherished faults, our worldliness and vanity and sin. Oh, father dear, we won’t let the discipline be in vain, will we ? We will be forgiving and loving and humble in our own souls, till our lives’ end. Now, go to Maud, and tell her that she is forgiven, and that her happiest days are still in store for her.”

“ You are a noble girl, Anne ! You are my Catherine’s daughter—I cannot give you higher praise.”

“ And I am my father’s daughter, too. I never loved you half as much as I do now. Are you going to Maud ? ”

“ I am. God bless you, child ; I believe Philip is waiting for you on the Esplanade. If I did not think he were worthy of you, he should never have you—not though he were wealthy as a Rothschild, and high-born as a Howard or a Percy ! ”

“ He is worthy, in every respect ; my only fear is that I am not worthy of him.”

* * * * *

“ And you quite forgive me, Robert ? ” said Maud, two hours afterwards. “ You are willing, after all my treachery, to take me to your heart again, to trust me with all that a man holds most sacred and most dear ? ”

“ I am willing, Maud,” he replied ; “ I trust you now fully, implicitly ; I think you will never deceive me, or any one, again. Ah ! you were cruelly treated, my poor dear ! If you had not had a great deal of real goodness

in yourself, you must surely have come to utter shame and ruin in those hard days of your neglected youth."

"I don't know about the good, Robert; but, when I look back, I am amazed at the snares which I escaped; at the pitfalls, the very brink of which I trod securely. Surely God was with me, though I knew Him not! It was His great goodness that kept me from a hundred awful dooms that might have been mine so easily. Yes, I can see now how God has always shut me in from the worst fates that threaten me. I was thinking of it last Sunday night in Robertson Street, when they were singing—

"Then, Lord, shall I fully know—
Not till then—how much I owe."

My heart was so full, I thought I must have come out of the chapel."

"I am afraid, dear, I have forgotten how much *I* owe. I am afraid I have been glorying for years in my own good sense and superior wisdom and far-seeing sagacity, forgetting that my labour had all been in vain had not God blessed it, and the fruit of it. I sorely needed chastisement, and I have had it. I only ask that it may not have been in vain. Yes; we will begin afresh, Maud; we will start again, and, by God's help, we will yet live to His glory."

And now that poor Maud's heart and conscience were at rest, overwrought nature seemed at last to sink under the long tension and the protracted pain. She was for a little while extremely ill; and then Robert knew how dearly he still loved her, and how impossible it was to think of a life apart from hers, unless, indeed, it were God's will to separate them. Hastings did not suit her, she said, so Robert hurried her back to town; but London air, in which she had erewhile flourished so well, did not improve her; and as the spring advanced she drooped more and more, and the famous Sir Henry was once more summoned to consult with Dr. Summers.

Their opinions exactly coincided; the lungs were, *as yet*, untouched; but something—Mr. Wreford's alarming illness, and the loss of the little ones, doubtless—had told so seriously on the whole system, that *atrophy* and slow

decline were to be apprehended. The patient was ordered to St. Moritz, and thither she went quite early in June, accompanied by Robert, Anne, and Laura Gresley.

In that pure, soft air, Maud began to recover, and when once amendment had set in it was steady and tolerably rapid. They spent the summer chiefly in the Engadine; and one day, in a quiet little chapel on the mountain-side, Robert and Maud were married again by the Protestant pastor of the place, Anne, and Philip—who had come over for the occasion—and Laura Gresley, being the only witnesses. Robert took care that every possible legal requirement should be satisfied; that nothing should be wanting to render the marriage valid in England, and that all necessary certificates and documents should be secured. No one would ever know that the old marriage was null and void; but should any *contretemps* ever ensue, here was satisfactory proof of an indisputable and perfectly valid union. Maud went back to London well and happy, and oh, *so thankful!*

In the autumn of that year Anne and Philip were married. Some time, perhaps, if the reader cares to hear more about them, we may introduce them again, as a wedded pair, living happily together, the parents of promising children, and the heads of a well-ordered and God-fearing household. Anne Rutland is very much like Anne Wreford, only people say she has developed into a very handsome woman; and her husband declares that she combines all her mother's sweetness and unselfishness with her father's excellent abilities, profound judgment, and, to a certain extent, ambition and persistency of aim.

Soon after the return from Switzerland, as Robert and his wife were sitting together one evening, Miss Knell was announced, and Robert interviewed her on his own account. He soon discovered that she was ignorant of Stephen Mallory's death, and wondered greatly at the protracted silence of her chief. She had either known nothing of the railway disaster, or she had failed to recognise her co-conspirator under his *alias* of "Marvel." In desperation, she came, therefore, to wring what she could out of Maud. Her first move was to ask after *Mrs. Mallory!*

Robert replied quite pleasantly, "There is no such person. Mr. Mallory died last October, and his widow and I were married as soon as necessary arrangements could be made. Oh, yes! I know all about my wife's previous history; and I scarcely wonder at her girlish infatuation for Stephen Mallory, when I take into account her miserable position at Stoke Newington, as the dependent of the Misses Cottle. Mrs. Wreford is very much engaged this evening, and begs to be excused. Have you any message for her?"

Almost stunned at her reception, and the news she received, Miss Knell went away, and Maud need never have seen her face again; but finding out that she was ill, friendless, and miserably poor, she visited her, tended her, and ministered to her out of her own abundance.

"Heaping coals of fire on my head!" she said one day, when Maud came to her with a £5 note, and a basket full of delicacies, such as might tempt the palate of a hopeless invalid. "Ah! Mrs. Wreford, you are my only friend, and I was your cruel, relentless enemy. I was ready to sell my own soul and yours, too, for a little filthy lucre. God forgive me!"

"He will forgive you, as I feel He has forgiven me, if you seek Him faithfully," was the reply; "and I thank Him from the bottom of my heart that He has permitted me to show you these little kindnesses, which really cost me nothing, and to smooth your passage to the grave."

For Miss Knell was dying, and she knew it, of that cruel disease—cancer; and but for Maud her sufferings would have been intensified by neglect and solitude, and the need of every common comfort. Her last words to the nurse Maud had placed with her were: "Give her my dear, *dear* love. Tell her I pray God to bless her and hers more and more every day. And if I *do* win heaven, and see Jesus my Lord, I shall tell Him how good she was! how *Christlike* has been her conduct to her *enemy*!"

Several years have passed since Maud was told that her ancient foe died with words of blessing on her lips. With deep humility the past is still remembered, but Maud's life is sweetly, quietly happy. She has two more little boys, and Robert is again hoping for the day when

the good old firm, still sometimes called "Bright and Hankins," shall be known as "*Wreford and Sons!*" But Anne is the daughter of his love; she is more to him than ten sons, he tells himself, when he recalls the past, and thinks of his gentle, sainted Catherine. He has never been quite as strong as he was before his illness, and now and then he says he feels that youth has altogether passed; that manly vigour is fading a little; and that before long the infirmities of age will be creeping upon him.

And as the afternoon shadows lengthen, and the evening comes on apace, he is quite sure now that he will never "make old bones," as people say. He grows more content, kinder, gentler, more considerate, and more earnest in God's work, which for so many years of his life he neglected or postponed to a future convenient season. Maud has never recovered her stately beauty; the traces of those weeks of anguish are still upon her, and will be, till all the burdens of the flesh are lifted for evermore; but her soul is at peace. She is blessed and honoured both as wife and mother, and deeply she loves, and is loved by, Robert Wreford's daughter.

One thing more: Laura Gresley never forgot the lessons she learned through Maud's chastisement. She became a sensible, useful Christian woman; and rather late in life she made what the world called "a surprisingly good match." What was more to the purpose, it was a really suitable and happy marriage.

THE END.



